

Spring 5-18-2019

Art Therapy and Art Education: A Conversation - A Critical Review of the Literature

Shannon Rogers

Lesley University, sroger15@lesley.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses

Part of the [Art Education Commons](#), [Art Practice Commons](#), [Early Childhood Education Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rogers, Shannon, "Art Therapy and Art Education: A Conversation - A Critical Review of the Literature" (2019). *Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses*. 192.

https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses/192

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences (GSASS) at DigitalCommons@Lesley. It has been accepted for inclusion in Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Lesley. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lesley.edu.

Art Therapy and Art Education: A Conversation

A Critical Review of the Literature

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

April 28, 2019

Shannon Rogers

Art Therapy

Christine Mayor

Abstract

Art therapists and art educators are continuing to define the boundaries of their professions while finding opportunities for collaboration. While there are limited studies focusing on art therapy with students, the existing research suggests that the interventions that have been done are associated with an increase of self-esteem, ability to communicate thoughts and feelings, and healthy self-expression for students. The topic question investigated in this paper is what are the emotional benefits of implementing art therapy for elementary students within art education? This literature review will explore what few have focused on, the overlap between art therapy and art education. This paper will analyze the existing literature and suggests there is promise in experimenting with the use of art therapy interventions within art education. In conclusion, art therapists and art educators need to continue further research in order to highlight the emotional benefits of art making in schools and to develop appropriate practice protocols.

Art Education and Art Therapy: A Conversation

Introduction

This writer has worked as an art teacher in a public elementary school and is in her final year of a graduate degree in mental health counseling with a specialization in art therapy. Having discovered the importance of mental health education and the need for emotional support of students, I am now on a journey to discovery where these fields may interact and blend. Mental health support in schools is important. The foundation of practicing self-care and healthy emotional expression is vital to successful child development. Therefore, I hope to gain more insight on the relationship of the fields of art education and art therapy and discover whether art therapists and art teachers do or should engage in conversation with one another. This paper will look at both fields, what goals they have in common, and where they can both unite to use art to support students. Yet, in gathering articles on this topic, I am led to believe there is a gap in the literature.

Working in an elementary art classroom, the constant flow through my door was a lot to keep up with. It was easy for me to judge a student by their external behavioral expressions when they were being rude, disruptive and not listening. However, during my work as an art teacher, I began to recognize this was a sign that these children needed something different. I noticed repeatedly that students with a reputation of being difficult with their classroom teachers often excelled in art class. They presented as excited, involved, patient, hardworking and creative. I became curious about what was helping students behave so differently through art and was increasingly interested in the overlap between art education and art therapy.

These classroom observations are related to my research question, which is “What are the emotional benefits of art therapy for elementary students within art education?” I will be

looking at research relating to the overlaps between art therapy and art education, arguing that the intentional use of art therapy with elementary students may be beneficial to their emotional growth. It is important to recognize and employ emerging theories and approaches to better facilitate student learning in schools. With an increase in students struggling with emotional expression, it is vital for those in the field working to support these students to advocate for what is most helpful to the students.

Art therapy is defined as “therapy based on engagement in artistic activities (such as painting or drawing) as a means of creative expression and symbolic communication especially in individuals affected with a mental or emotional disorder or cognitive impairment” (Merriam Webster, 2006). This type of therapy is beneficial to a wide range of populations as it helps clients process unconscious feelings and emotions and express those in another format different from traditional talk therapy. Randick and Dermer (2013) describe school art therapists as therapists or counselors who provide intervention and prevention services. Art therapy can also enable students to identify their subjective inner worlds (feelings, thoughts, beliefs, dreams, and internal conflicts) through the creative process (Randick & Dermer, 2013). What is created then becomes the vehicle through which transformation and insight begins (Randick & Dermer, 2013).

By contrast, art education is often focused on learning the formal elements of art and principles of design such as value, line and form; to teach individuals how to apply this knowledge in creating more intricate and aesthetically pleasing pieces (Hetland, 2013). Most often the focus is on the product of the art rather than the process. Artists may naturally include their own emotions and feelings in their pieces because they have created something that had only previously existed inside their own head. However, unlike art therapy, emotional self-

expression is not necessarily the goal of the artistic process. Art education in the schools often includes the structure of grading final assignments, in order to evaluate whether a student is able to satisfactorily demonstrate the skill that was taught. In this way, there are traditional and conventional tools, techniques and approaches standardized throughout the art community (Hetland, 2013).

Knowledge of art therapy has great importance for art teachers. Ellis and Lawrence (2009) suggest that there is a need for art therapy programs in schools, finding that art can increase empathy and emotional involvement. Knowledge of the potential therapeutic benefits for incorporating art therapy with students in school has great importance for the future of mental health practices and stigmas surrounding mental health services in today's youth. Data has also been presented in the literature (Albert, 2010; Alexander, 1990; Kay & Wolf, 2017) which suggest that art is a powerful form of expression. However, these studies have failed to recognize the ways in which art therapy and art education can collaborate in schools for the benefit of the students. Indeed, despite the potential importance of art therapy in schools, few researchers have studied the emotional impact of art classes on the general population of elementary students. Little has been written about the overlap and integration of art therapy and art education. The existing research has tended to focus on specific subgroups rather than the school population as a whole, which would include both regular and special education students.

The question remains - is there a way to incorporate art therapy practices in the art education curriculum to better support all students' emotional development and needs? However, it is unclear whether the use of art therapy can be modified to function in the context of the art room. Hence, further studies of art education's emotional impact are needed. This paper attempts

to establish the foundation for further study on the use of art therapy in art class to emotionally support elementary students.

The remainder of this paper is divided into the following sections: methods; literature review, containing six subsections (Need for Emotional Development, Existing Emotional Developmental Support In Schools, Art Therapy in Schools, Art Education with Elementary Students, The Differences Between Art Therapy and Art Education, and Art Education and Art Therapy with Elementary Students with Emotional Needs); discussion section; limitations; future recommendations for research and practice; and a conclusion.

Methods

I am using a literature review, to compare the two field of art therapy and art education, to synthesize and critically review the research in arts based emotional support for students. I searched the terms: art education, art therapy, visual art teaching, learning, instruction, education, emotions, feelings, experiences, perceptions, art therapy and curriculum and school, art therapists working in schools, art therapy or art psychotherapy or art intervention and school on the Lesley library database to see what literature is published. To search the literature, I needed to gather articles from both fields. As I critically reviewed each peer reviewed article and searched for information that was relevant to my topic, I answered each of these main questions: What is the research question? What is the rationale of the article or need for study? What are the findings? What are the limitations stated? What is the conclusion/future research implications? Then I included my own assessments, critiques, limits and assumptions. I highlighted what I was taking away from the research, what is relevant to me, and included important quotations that jumped out. Once I gathered my articles I then began entwining and connecting them to establish a theme.

Literature Review

Need for Emotional Development

School systems continue to seek useful ways to address the needs of an increasing number of students with emotional disturbances who are very often underserved and inadequately served, according to Dunn-Snow and D'Amelio (2000). Practices continue to evolve as the fields of education and mental health change and grow. Quite a few sources have suggested students' emotional developmental needs are an area many students need strong support in place to achieve stability in the classroom. Emotional literacy is,

[D]efined as the capacity of a person to understand their emotional experiences. Children who possess emotional literacy are emotionally aware, alive and connected with themselves, with others and with experiences and surrounding situations. As a result, they are better equipped to develop capacity to engage with and manage difficult emotional experiences, and, as a consequence, can be more resilient in the face of emotional challenges. (Nixon, 2016, p. 181-2)

Elementary students ages five to eleven are predominately receiving developmental supports within the schools they attend every day, for months and years (Nixon, 2016). The elementary years set the stage in children's neurological development as an optimal time to build relationships, connectedness, empathy, self-awareness and resilience, which lead to mentally healthy children and adults (Nixon, 2016). Due to their impressionable age and the core concepts necessary for a positive mental health foundation, the schools have the best chance to reach these youth.

Elementary students are learning so much every day and even as young as five years old are forced to endure standardized testing. Isis et al. (2010) found with the No Child Left Behind

Act of 2001, there was an emphasis on testing resulting in increased levels of anxiety amongst students. In addition to the general curriculum, students must be taught and given guidance around self-care and internal processing of their environmental and internal stress. As part of learning to take care of themselves and think for themselves they need to be given the tools to process their thoughts and feelings. Many children struggling with behavioral challenges will benefit from art therapy and emotional processing. More recently, researchers argued that childhood adversity alters the development of the biological stress response system so that a child's ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors becomes impaired, which in turn can create social, emotional and behavioral problems (Coholic & Eys, 2016, p. 2). There is always a reason for the behavior and as the adult it is our job to help the child find solutions and equip them with coping skills to feel better.

Gibbons (2010) supports the idea that mental health services typically help children integrate their experiences and build effective coping skills. By allowing students a safe space to practice communication skills you are preparing them to become functional members of society (Gibbons, 2010). Students with an inconsistent role model at home in regard to healthy emotional expression and positive communication skills may never be offered a chance to recognize right from wrong in regard to respecting others (Gibbons, 2010). In this way, the mental health professionals who focus on child intervention can provide instruction that some parents may not be able to provide, if they have not been given these services themselves. The mental health field hopes to break the cycle of families not teaching functional emotional expression skills and schools increasing stressors on children.

Collaboration between support in home and at school is vital and many families have supported the incorporation of art therapy into their child's school curriculum to support

academic performance (Isis, 2010). A parent supporter wrote of their gratitude and advocacy for the art therapy program at M-DCPS saying, "I believe art therapy is an exceptional alternative to conventional counseling. As a result of my daughter receiving art therapy, she is more focused, shows an improvement in impulse control, and has developed strategies to cope during stressful situations" (Isis, 2010, p. 61). Schools have continually recognized the ever growing need for emotional support during children's optimal developmental time period and families have continually shown support in utilizing the arts. The question is: what is already in place?

Existing Emotional Developmental Support In Schools

The responsibility of the school to educate children is no longer limited to the idea of simply teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic, the common standards (Randick & Dermer, 2013). In fact research shows "schools are the primary providers of mental health services for children" (Hoagwood & Erwin, 1997, p. 435). Today schools are also responsible for children's emotional and social well-being (Randick & Dermer, 2013). This section explores four existing approaches to supporting students emotional development: Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs), Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP), Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and the Creative Learning Assessment (CLA).

Coholic and Eys, (2016) discussed promising results from a study exploring the benefits and effectiveness of a 12-week arts-based mindfulness group program for vulnerable children who needed self-esteem improvement and improving coping and social skills. Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have emerged as promising interventions for youth in school settings (Coholic & Eys, 2016). MBIs with children show a wide range of benefits including stress reduction, developing inhibitory control, emotional regulation, lowering internalizing and externalizing behaviors and improving executive functioning (Coholic & Eys, 2016, p. 1). MBIs

that have been studied in schools include *MindfulKids*, a mindfulness training for elementary school children, which was found effective for reducing stress and behavioral difficulties (Coholic & Eys, 2016, p. 2). One pilot study was conducted using an 8-week arts-based mindfulness program with at-risk elementary students utilizing yoga, music and meditation to help students express themselves and feel calmer and more focused (Coholic & Eys, 2016, p. 2).

Based on the successful results of these MBIs, Coholic and Eys (2016) developed their own study, the HAP, writing, "In HAP, mindfulness is conceptualized in accordance with Kabat-Zinn's (1990) definition of mindfulness: activity that encourages awareness to emerge through paying attention on purpose, non-judgmentally, in the present moment" (p. 2). In total, 90 children completed the HAP, a voluntary strengths-based program focused on improving self-concept, emotional-regulation and self-esteem (Coholic & Eys, 2016). Results were analyzed using a mixed methods approach and a quasi-experimental design (Coholic & Eys, 2016).

Results confirm what has long been accepted within helping professions - that using creative activities can support youth in nonverbal communication and expressing many of their thoughts and feelings (Coholic & Eys, 2016, p. 3). They write, "Children and guardians reported improved abilities to understand and deal with feelings. They also reported feeling better about themselves and more confident, and a better ability to pay attention and focus, which is important in school functioning and learning" (Coholic & Eys, 2016, p. 9). Feedback from participants shows improvement and symptom reduction.

The CLA was a framework designed to employ teachers to develop creative learning opportunities and assignments for students throughout the school year (Ellis & Lawrence, 2009). The study found, with teacher and student feedback, that these assignments allowed for better teacher understanding of their students' learning styles, opportunities for students to play more of

a part in their own learning, and a dramatic increase in students' acceptance of feedback and an increase in empathy and emotional involvement. These findings suggest that art being incorporated in the general classroom setting is important for students' self-growth and self-discovery. These skills should be developed to allow students the confidence to try and fail in school, and not be nervous about getting it wrong. I believe children need to further develop these skills, and do not always have the opportunity to practice emotional regulation before adults intervene.

In a study of the CLA framework being implemented during a yearlong period in an elementary school, the projects included painting, sculpture, construction, drama, dance and literature (Ellis & Lawrence, 2009). Ellis and Lawrence (2009) explain the use of the CLA model; comprised of an observation framework, portfolio of children's work with reflective commentary and a 5-point scale based on the national curriculum statements of attainment in arts subjects. For example, one student's portfolio commentary showed his increasing emotional involvement in the creative activity. In creative contexts and over time, this student demonstrated and articulated increased empathy and emotional involvement (Ellis & Lawrence, 2009). In this way, art education provided an emotional benefit to elementary students, and the CLA seemed to positively influence children's learning and teachers' teaching. This study aimed to record the impact of a creative curriculum to enable schools to justify the positive impact and necessity for implementation (Ellis & Lawrence, 2009).

Additionally, the CLA was able to benefit students emotionally. As Ellis and Lawrence (2009) wrote, "At the beginning of the year, many children were unconfident writers, worried about "getting it wrong" and sensitive to any comments about their writing. However, by the end of the year they were far more accepting of critical feedback" (p. 8). One teacher shared that the

arts curriculum is the area where children can have the most freedom to experiment and explore, where there is often no right or wrong way, stating, “The CLA helped me to identify the creative strengths of children who struggled academically and whose creative potential had not yet been realized. Children love to experiment, and use ‘big’ words and the creative forms are full of technical and expressive language” (Ellis & Lawrence, 2009, p. 6-7). This model framework was able to cater to different students learning styles and allow teachers to be more aware and receptive to what their students respond to. Further, for students struggling with the traditional mode of education, they argue, “The focus on creative learning also showed that creative contexts empower children who are not shown as ‘achieving’ in academic subjects or through current testing systems” (Ellis & Lawrence, 2009, p. 9).

Last, legislation has supported the creation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for students in special education. While assessments have been known to be a source of students’ anxiety, “assessment results guide the development of the student's educational goals, which are integrated into the student's annual Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The IEP is a legal document that mandates the specific academic, emotional and social goals for each student receiving special education” (Isis, 2010, p. 59). IEPs are a plan of adapting to the educational needs of a student and track progress towards academic as well as emotional goals through maintaining a clinical file for each student receiving individualized support. There is an increasing demand to find viable support services for students’ emotional growth and strategies to accommodate all students’ needs. While IEPs exist for students in special education or formal diagnosis, there may be value in considering what this would look like if schools took seriously the unique social, emotional, and academic goals of each student. The process of creating these

services within the school curriculum appears to be underway, but what we have right now in practice is not enough.

Art Therapy in Schools

Before looking specifically at art therapy in schools, I looked at a literature review article that aimed to identify any outcome trends associated with research design and to review the overall literature base concerning art therapy effectiveness (Reynolds, Nabors & Quinlan, 2000). Seventeen published studies assessed the impact of art therapy treatment using a measurable outcome (e.g., depression, self-esteem, behaviors). The authors argue, “It is difficult to prove the benefit of art therapy versus traditional talk therapy because research is not regulated and there had only been a handful of studies conducted before 2000” (Reynolds et al., 2000, p. 207). The implication of these findings demonstrated the need for standardization of art therapy practice and research in order to quantify the effectiveness.

Collaborative efforts between researchers and art therapists may improve the ability of clinicians in this field to conduct large-scale effectiveness studies assessing the impact of art therapy. This article dictates the need for further research and a way for art therapists and researchers to consider variables such as measurable outcomes empirical evidence and ways to measure their treatments and client progress specifically in relation to art therapy interventions. Given the global lack of empirical data supporting the effectiveness of art therapy, it is not surprising that the specific literature on art therapy in schools is limited. Nevertheless, I summarized the existing literature below.

Students present with many difficulties at school, including the topic of this capstone – emotional wellbeing. As Albert (2010) wrote, “Students in need are everywhere” (p. 90). Randick and Dermer (2013) discuss how the “here and now” helps students to alleviate anxiety and

supports positive decision making based on awareness of tacit current knowledge explored in art. Provided the skills to self-regulate their own anxieties throughout the school day, a student may be allowed a chance to operate in a clearer head space and achieve a higher level of learning. One study was done to show “tactile deprivation has been associated with learning problems and lack of trust and confidence” (Fontenot, 2018, p. 3). Therefore, For those students who tend to become sidetracked with emotional drama or who lack tactile engagement, the incorporation of art therapy with the school day will allow time and space to positively reset, reassess and promote positive decision making. The student will hopefully be able to return their focus to learning when given the opportunity to practice emotional regulation skills, which, in the elementary years, are still developing.

While not a study, Albert (2010) covered her personal journey of discovering a balance between her skills as an art therapist and bringing them into her high school art room. She demonstrates successfully balancing the academic and therapeutic benefits and learning within her classroom. Her students are connecting to the materials and lessons and furthering their individualized growth. Art is a powerful form of expression, communication and release when often something you are processing inside yourself is “too big for words” (2010).

Gibbons (2010) also demonstrated a successful group combining the creative arts in a classroom setting in collaboration with the teacher to achieve conflict resolution using circle work, open discussion, mandala drawings, and other art projects. Results of this school intervention showed a change in culture leading to students having a better understanding of conflict resolution and problem solving (Gibbons, 2010). Achieving group cohesion can provide the chance for the teacher to shift their focus back to learning rather than digressing to support classroom discourse. The preliminary findings from this study suggest that art therapy may

benefit not only individual students, but the classroom environment as a whole, but further empirical evidence is needed.

Further, the article by Rousseau, Drapeau, Lacroix, Bagilishya and Heusch (2005), describes quantitative data taken to assess the effect of creative expression workshops in schools designed for immigrant children. Co-run by an art therapist and a psychologist during the school day, this program focused on story sharing, artistic expression, and collaborative play, processing the migration experience and building relationship. Results concluded from this study show there are benefits and evidence of change in student's self-esteem.

The Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) in Florida offers art therapy services in school and have a clinical art therapy department (Isis, Bush, Siegel & Ventura, 2010). This article aims to reflect on the potential to inspire the practice and implementation of art therapy in schools nationwide (Isis et al., 2010). A pilot program was introduced in the M-DCPS in 1979 with an emphasis placed on the uniqueness of a combined art education and art therapy service (Isis et al., 2010, p. 57). Through specialized staff development, a school treatment team took shape, with the program model structured much like a clinical day treatment program (Isis et al., 2010, p. 57).

The M-DCPS Clinical Art Therapy Department continues to work toward their ultimate goal to empower students through creativity (Isis, 2010, p. 61). Robin, instructional supervisor said, "Nationally, the M-DCPS Art Therapy Department is the largest and most comprehensive service provider of clinical art therapy to students with emotional problems in a school setting" (Isis et al., 2010, p. 61). They write, "During the 1989-99 academic years, the program matured. Staff increased substantially from 8, to 14, and finally to 21 full-time art therapists" (Isis et al., 2010, p. 58). The Miami-Dade County Public Schools art therapy services felt the need to

conform to the ever-evolving structure of the education system, but did so by incorporating therapeutic services to better support students.

Additional goals of art therapy in schools include decreasing academic difficulties (Loesl as cited in Randick & Dermer, 2013) and exploring conflicts with teachers and peers (Gibbons, 2010, as cited in Randick & Dermer, 2013). Utilizing art therapy in the common core subjects may also assist in guiding students in satisfactorily and independently navigating their schools day, but more research into this possibility is needed.

Art Education with Elementary Students

Art education has been a victim of school budget cuts, unfortunately, however strategically incorporating the elements of art education into the general curriculum can reposition art education as a more central access point to social development and learning (Nixon, 2016). Art education has a unique vantage point to access students' nonverbal communications. Elementary students are at the age of exploration through their creative senses and art teachers have the opportunity to direct these fundamental learning opportunities for personal self-discovery.

Art teachers in turn will be able to alert staff and family about students' verbal or graphic expressions, which "may be the first step in discovering and potentially helping solve a problem" (Dunn-Snow & D'Amelio, 2000, p. 48). Art teachers are able to provide art activities as the foundation to which students have the opportunity to create tangible ways to adapt, cope and thrive within the safe confines of the art room (Dunn-Snow & D'Amelio, 2000). Establishing this safe environment within the school setting seems to be a unique access point of art education; when students feel comfortable it would appear they would be more apt to share their inner turmoil.

Haberlin (2017) shared that he thinks it is important to recognize the way teachers in the classroom have the power to facilitate these therapeutic art experiences for the students. To find the emotional benefits for the students it is also necessary to consider who will be setting the students up for success. The teacher remains the main guiding factor in the service delivery (Haberlin, 2017). In Haberlin's (2017) experience, it appears that in K-5 grade art is exciting and a special that many children look forward to. The projects are often exciting, engaging and although they can be structured, they appear to encourage students to find their own voice and express themselves. Teachers' affects can set the stage for students' engagement and with the right hook, students may be well on their way to self-exploration.

A struggle many art teachers face is not having enough experience or training to support or intervene with complex student issues (Kay, 2013). Kay (2013) interviewed an art teacher who stated, "I believe that education in art is to get students to express their feelings-their identity. In my teaching, I'm kind of like a personal coach assisting kids in becoming strong and believing in themselves. I want my students to be positive, look on the bright side of thing and stay playful" (Kay, 2013, p. 9). Although they have the desire to support students' self-expression and identity development, art teachers aren't given enough training to cope with "the emotional side of teaching" (Kay, 2013, p. 10). Kay (2013) refers to the limits and constraints of simply using words to express student emotional development and urges the art education realm to pursue the unique opportunities the arts provide.

The Differences Between Art Therapy and Art Education

The major difference between the two fields may be summarized by "art teachers teach; art therapists treat" (Kay & Wolf, 2017, p. 27). As Reynolds et al. (2000) explain, "Art therapy practice involves the application of knowledge about human emotional, social, and behavioral

development” (p. 207). Due to the nature of art making and the potential ground it offers for unconscious material to be manifested, art teachers have long been concerned about how to deal with a child in crisis within the structure of a school setting (Loesl, 2010). Teachers may be trained in child development and psychology courses but often to a limited degree, where “teachers are trained in behavioral management and crisis interventions, not mental health counseling procedures” (Dunn-Snow & D'Amelio, 2000, p. 47). Therefore, there is a need for art educators and art therapists in higher education to engage in professional dialogue (Dunn-Snow & D'Amelio, 2000). Loesl (2010) works as an art therapist in schools. He writes, “As part of collaboration between art therapists and art educators, I led two workshops that explored the interface of our respective work with students. Conversation between art therapists and art educators at this National Art Education Association annual convention lead to fostering understanding of how far an art educator can go in utilizing art therapy techniques” (Loesl, 2010, p. 54).

In consideration of the historical development of art therapy, it is recognized that art therapy is a newer field compared to that of art education. Dunn-Snow and D'Amelio (2000) discuss how the American Art Therapy Association celebrated 25 years as an organization in 1994. It is now double its age in 2019 operating as a national organization for 50 years. Comparatively, art has been a subject in school for generations, and art education is already normalized in the school setting. In 1976, Edwards discussed how ambiguities generated by the unacknowledged overlap between treatment and education have hardly been resolved, which reflects a larger social situation (Edwards, 1976, p. 64). The situation is the unacknowledged gap between treatment and education. This highlights the lack of discussion in education and mental health fields. The “larger social situation” at hand is the concern that we are not including

modalities we know to be beneficial in our standardized education of the youth. Edwards (1976) comments, “It would be difficult to choose two more apparently dissimilar kinds of involvement within the visual arts in recent years than conceptual art and art therapy” (p. 64). Edwards is saying that art for creation’s sake is different from art therapy where the participant is actively seeking to understand their own mental health. He also mentioned the complementary notion that artistic understanding may be a source of insight in psychology but has been insufficiently explored in the art therapy field (Edwards, 1976, p. 66).

Further, in a discussion between the field of art therapy and art education at the National Art Education Association annual convention, several art educators truly felt that their work incorporated art therapy already, as the spontaneous imagery created by their students sometimes brought up suggestible issues (Loesl, 2010). Loesl (2010) shared a firsthand account in which “art was the vehicle that alerted the art teacher/therapist to pursue more information about the intent behind the image that was created” (p. 55). The power of art to bring out a student’s innermost thoughts is something to appreciate and respect. However, we also must be aware that it may break down the floodgates of student emotions that may need to be handled immediately. If these professionals are naturally experiencing an over-lap happening, it highlights why we need to understand these overlaps and consider how to do more of this work with our students.

Further, participants in art often vocalize feeling insecure in their abilities saying, “I can’t draw a straight line” (Rubin, 2001, p. 88). While an art education might support a student in learning that skill, in contrast an art therapist is focused on the process of creation and better understanding these insecurities. Art in a structured experiential is led by a trained art therapist who can facilitate creation, and an individual’s reaction is important not only in the final product but the entire process of creation (Rubin, 2001). Material choice, color, and whatever the client is

able to process internally and externalize into an art piece can be a powerful experience to view the inner monologue by looking and reflecting on experiences from a new perspective (Rubin, 2001). The art therapist will guide the client to understand the meaning of what they produce through a collaborative discussion (Rubin, 2001). This differs from art education where the skill and product are often valued over the process or meaning.

There are often key differences in intent and practice between art therapy and art education. Art therapy focuses on internal processes and the whole art experience; it is not based on skill. Art education is product-oriented and interpretation of other artists' techniques and application, which is often less personal and based in skill. While there are many differences between art therapy and art education, their foundations in feelings, materials and techniques are the same.

Art Education and Art Therapy with Elementary Students with Emotional Needs

Despite the differences outlined above, there are several authors who discuss the benefits to students when art education and art therapy are both offered. Both art therapists and art educators seek to improve the emotional well-being of elementary students while improving upon emotional development as well as academic functioning, thus both can impact the other (Randick & Dermer, 2013). By supporting students' well-being they will theoretically perform better in school and vice versa. These two fields operate under similar goals and can benefit one another when used in conjunction with one another.

Both fields of art education and art therapy offer beneficial skills and processing to a healthy creative mind. Many art teachers have embraced art therapy by taking classes to gain more experience in art therapy as well as to add "art therapist" to their credentials (Loesl, 2010). As Loesl (2010) states, "As more art educators familiarize themselves with art therapy, I have

found that they are increasingly inclined to prevent vulnerable children from slipping through the cracks by changing the once prevalent attitude in the schools of “don’t worry—it’s only a picture” (p.). Further, Florida art therapists can obtain a teaching credential in school art therapy, but most states do not have such certification (Loesl, 2010).

There are themes that overlap the two fields, such as the attention to the emotional needs of the students, exploration of themes related to self-identity and the value of self-expression to communicate and understand oneself within the context of the world (Kay & Wolf, 2017, p. 27). A student who participated in weekly expressive arts classes in Pennsylvania designed to activate inner strength said, “I got it out; my heart healed.” Another student shared, “I learned to express myself instead of holding everything in. I learned to let it out” (Kay & Wolf, 2017, p. 31). These girls were able to gain a sense of comfort and awareness through their art process. Most importantly they were able to be vulnerable and build trust amongst participants. These examples demonstrate successful art therapy interventions within art education.

Further, “Feelings and emotions about oneself can interfere with functioning” (Alexander, 1990, p. 1). Given the need to help students understand, express, and at times regulate these feelings, there is a need to better integrate arts-based therapeutic options into existing classroom structures. Albert (2010) says students who engaged in art experience demonstrated “increased self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-advocacy; developing frustration tolerance, creative thinking, and healthy risk taking; communicating personal stories; reconnecting to cultural heritage; and validating important life experiences” (p. 91). These skills are important to develop early on so they can be implemented when needed. Skills like these continue to serve the child throughout their lifetime. Art-making in the classroom can benefit emotionally disturbed students by helping to define and understand their own feelings, express

those feelings, and recognize others who may have feelings similar to theirs (Alexander, 1990, p. 1).

There is also a continued need for teachers to be willing to work with diverse populations of students and learn to make accommodations to meet their student at their academic and emotional level of functioning, reinforcing the need for art therapy programs to partner with art education (Albert, 2010). To support students' emotional needs in the classroom, art therapy programs can support in children in learning and practicing those skills. In the same way that an intake interview alerts the therapist to a client's past experiences and coping strategies that have previously been effective, an assessment of student background knowledge allows a teacher to understand the student and how they learn best (Albert, 2010). Assessments can become beneficial to teachers when the information is gathered in the right way and then in turn used to benefit the students.

Lisa Kay (2013) has worked as an art therapist and art educator and explains the process of carefully and intentionally selecting beads to construct and tell personal narratives. Kay explains that working in educational and therapeutic contexts with youth in crisis is the focus of her research (Kay, 2013). Through her work Kay discovered her role of artist, art therapist, and art educator are not separate entities, but rather an integrated whole (Kay, 2013). She writes, "As a non-verbal arts-based process, this method can promote meaning making through self-reflection and support self-identity through visual storytelling: (Kay, 2013, p. 14). In this way, art therapy and art education when combined have the possibilities of "encouraging feeling expression, developing self-identity, and promoting self-esteem, bead collage is a relevant teaching and learning strategy" (Kay, 2013, p. 14). Kay's bead collage works with points of connection that link memories and thoughts in the brain. This process can increase activity in

neuro-pathways and synthesize ideas into a meaningful whole. Kay's (2013) method "intensifies the process of meaning making by creating a three-dimensional connection" (p. 15). It can be used to allow for collaborative learning and art making, assess learning and literally construct new knowledge (Kay, 2013).

Randick and Dermer (2013) along with the other researchers discussed above, recognize that in some schools art therapy is part of a blended model of support services encompassing school counseling, art therapy, and art education, but the challenge for school art therapy programs is the ongoing need for research to validate art therapy interventions in the school system. These interventions are already being implemented with positive results and both fields need more research to discover the next steps in best supporting our students emotional needs in the classroom. There is currently a need for more research as schools found they had difficulty providing evidence for the impact of creativity and were unable to provide convincing information (Ellis & Lawrence, 2009).

Discussion

Limitations

The fact that there is a gap in emotional support services using art therapy in school is the reason behind the various studies mentioned above. There is not a large amount of research to pull from within this topic, therefore my argument for integrating art therapy into art education in the schools is limited by the large gaps in the research literature. With only a small amount of studies to draw from, my claims of emotional benefits in students are weakened with less evidence from the field.

As an art therapist in training with a background in art education I felt as if I was looking at the research from the inside out. I was able to see from both sides, sitting in between and most

research comes pointedly from one direction or the other. Due to my position in the middle, I am clearly passionate about this gap and may have missed by research that would disprove my thinking that these two fields should engage in conversation. I have my own feelings behind this, which is why I believe I may have been less objective than I intended to be. I also feel, for this particular area of study, it was a helpful guiding view. However most articles discuss either art therapy or art education and there is a small amount of individuals operating under both umbrellas. Again the need to close the gap and engage in conversation is highlighted.

Future Recommendations

In this research and exploration of the literature, it was found that there can be benefits in initiating a conversation between the fields of art therapy and art education. The literature explained common links in practice and showed the benefits for using art with children in schools. The potential contribution of this topic to clinical practice is thinking about how the incorporation of art therapy into art education programs might assist with assessment, providing opportunities for emotional expression and containment, and alleviate art teachers from needing to determine the appropriate course of action if disturbing imagery existed in students' art. Further, art therapists can aid art educators in balancing the need for skills and product, to developing creative expression and process. Art therapists might also help educators find ways to use art to process difficult experiences and enable conflict resolution. All of these are helpful when exploring the emotional benefits of combining both approaches.

Collaboration, art therapists in schools, art therapy practiced in schools, modeling positive mental health practices, engaging in conversation, and teaching children terminology are what the education system should be striving for. Previous research has proven that it is beneficial for children to engage in art therapy practices to gain positive self-care and emotional

self-advocacy skills which is why I recommend the two fields of art therapy and art education entwine their approaches.

We should incorporate more art into schools to support students' emotional regulation development and study the impact. Specific ways in which this can be done is providing group work in the classroom with collaborative art projects and daily emotional check ins. According to the literature discussed above, research suggests that collaboration between all professionals working with elementary students included, but was not limited to, teachers, art teachers, psychologists and art therapists. Having all team members working towards the common goal of emotional support of the child is the most effective way to support students emotional needs in school. Collaboration is key to obtain the most effective support and treatment of elementary student emotional needs.

As a practical example, my own firsthand experience working as an art teacher in an elementary school has demonstrated to me the benefits of students gaining emotional regulation. Allowing students to slow down, think, plan, breathe and create are necessary for emotional development. One thing I found that was beneficial was the connection of color and clearly labeling the zones of regulation for students to easily identify and follow. In each school I have worked at it is a common standard to use regulation zones of the body ranging from the green zone where "body is appropriate", to the yellow "I am a little out of control" to the red zone where "I am not being safe or doing what is expected of me". Colors were assigned a feeling in the body. This artistic process of visualizing and externalizing a feeling within their bodies aided students in identifying the difference between how they are feeling and acting and what's appropriate or not. Students were able to recognize within themselves when they were moving out of a safe zone and self-correct the behavior caused by the emotion with faster turnaround to

return to the task at hand. Further experimentations of how art therapists and art educators might collaborate using the shared language of art is needed.

Further, this review of the existing is important because it demonstrates that this work is highly beneficial. If art was more integrated, I believe students would have an easier time expressing emotions in a healthy way and productive to their own learning and that of their classmates. More research is needed in order to validate this claim, and to call for further development and integration of more art therapy programs in schools in coordination with classroom teachers, guidance counselors, art educators and art therapists. I propose further research and studies be done to highlight the emotional benefits of art making for elementary students throughout the school day as opposed to individual counseling outside of school. For example, a comparative study might be done between students assigned to outside counseling versus those assigned to school-provided art therapy activities. Additionally, a comparison between the benefits of art education, art therapy, combined art education and therapy, and no interventions might help to deepen the evidence for this approach.

I also recommend art therapists and art educators continue to develop assessments and gather data on the effects of art on students' emotional development. The field of art therapy has evolved over the past century and will continue to change and evolve. Our role in the schools might be an important one to consider in this next phase of development. Often participants experience a full understanding of the powers of art therapy after experiencing it firsthand or being witness to the process. There is art in therapy and art as therapy. Therefore, it may be important to conduct qualitative studies that ask students about their experiences with the healing potential of art.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that there is limited research discussing the benefit of combining art therapy with art education, the studies that have been done suggest that there may be advantages to student wellbeing in integrating art therapy and art education. One might also imagine that this approach might be positive for teachers. Those working directly with the elementary population will be able to sustain a more conducive learning environment when the children have been taught how to successfully incorporate healthy emotional regulation into their daily practices. It is vital to introduce and maintain an interest in the art and creative expression starting students young and continue to grow their imagination for creation. For future generations we must consider the importance of engaging in conversation and implementing art therapy practices across the entire school system.

References

- Albert, R. (2010). Being both: An integrated model of art therapy and alternative art education. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association, 27*(2), 90–95.
- Alexander, K. C. (1990). Learning about feelings through classroom art activities. *Preventing School Failure, 35*(1), 1-5.
- Cobbett, S. (2016). Reaching the hard to reach: Quantitative and qualitative evaluation of school-based arts therapies with young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties, 21*(4), 403–415.
- Coholic, D. A., & Eys, M. (2016). Benefits of an arts-based mindfulness group intervention for vulnerable children. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal, 1*(1), 1-13.
doi: 10.1007/s10560-015-0431-3
- Dunn-Snow, P., & D'Amelio, G. (2000). How art teachers can enhance artmaking as a therapeutic experience: Art therapy and art education. *Art Education, 53*(3), 46-53.
doi:10.2307/3193873
- Edwards, M. (1976). Art therapy and art education: Towards a reconciliation. *Studies in Art Education, 17*(2), 63-66.
- Ellis, S., & Lawrence, B. (2009). The influence of the Creative Learning Assessment (CLA) on children's learning and teachers' teaching. *Literacy, 1*, 3-10.
- Gibbons, K. (2010). Circle justice: A creative arts approach to conflict resolution in the classroom. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association, 27*(2), 84–89.
doi:10.1080/07421656.2010.10129716
- Haberlin, S. (2017). Using arts-based research to explore peak experiences in five gifted children. *International Journal of Education & the Arts, 18*(24), 1-22.

- Hetland, L. (2013). *Studio thinking 2: The real benefits of visual arts education* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hoagwood, K., & Erwin, H. D. (1997). Effectiveness of school-based mental health services for children: A 10-year research review. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 6(4), 435–451. doi:10.1023/A:1025045412689
- Isis, P. D., Bush, J., Siegel, C. A., & Ventura, Y. (2010). Empowering students through creativity: Art therapy in Miami-Dade County public schools. *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 27(2), 56–61.
- Kay, L. (2013). Bead collage: An arts-based research method. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 14(3), 1-18.
- Kay, L. & Wolf, D. (2017). Artful coalitions: Challenging adverse adolescent experiences. *Art Education*, 70(5), 26-33. doi:10.1080/00043125.2017.1335542
- Loesl, S. (2010). Introduction to the special issue on art therapy in the schools: Art therapy + schools + students = ? *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 27(2), 54–56. doi:10.1080/07421656.2010.10129718
- Reynolds, M. W., Nabors, L., & Quinlan, A. (2000). The effectiveness of art therapy: Does it work?. *Art Therapy*, 17(3), 207-213. doi: 10.1080/07421656.2000.10129706
- Nixon, M. (2016). Knowing me knowing you: Enhancing emotional literacy through visual arts. *International Journal of Education through Art*, 12(2), 181–193.
- Randick, N. M., & Dermer, S. B. (2013). The relationship of school art therapy and the American school counselor national model. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 30(1), 30–35.
- Rousseau, C., Drapeau, A., Lacroix, L., Bagilishya, D., & Heusch, N. (2005). Evaluation of a

classroom program of creative expression workshops for refugee and immigrant children. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 46(2), 180–185.

Rubin, J. A. (2011). *Art of art therapy: What every art therapist needs to know*. New York: Routledge.

Sitzer, D. L., & Stockwell, A. B. (2015). The art of wellness: A 14-week art therapy program for at-risk youth. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 45, 69–81. doi: 10.1016/j.aip.2015.05.007

THESIS APPROVAL FORM

Lesley University
Graduate School of Arts & Social Sciences
Expressive Therapies Division
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Art Therapy, MA

Student's Name: _____ Shannon Rogers _____

Type of Project: Thesis

Title: _____ Art Therapy and Art Education: A Conversation _____ A Critical Review of the Literature

Date of Graduation: _____ May 18th, 2019 _____

In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor: _____ Christine Mayor _____