Emotional Regulation & Therapeutic Rapport with Adolescents: Exploring the Effectiveness of the Expressive Therapies Continuum

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Emotional Regulation & Therapeutic Rapport with Adolescents:
Exploring the Effectiveness of the Expressive Therapies Continuum

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Abstract

Art therapy is a beneficial service for adolescents who face obstacles connecting emotionally, behaviorally, and academically. Creative techniques and therapeutic rapport can facilitate connection with the self, focus, and emotional regulation. Teens, especially struggling with mental health, often have difficulty functioning in the average public-school setting. Research supports a positive correlation to art therapy services and effectiveness in a school setting. The intention of this capstone was to test the effectiveness of the expressive therapies continuum (ETC) in supporting emotional regulation with two high school girls in a therapeutic day school. The method of research includes a pre-, post-, and emotional connection survey partnered with art making for five 30-minute sessions over five weeks. The students rated their current emotion and choose a material with the research that may be helpful.

Due to COVID-19, the study was terminated prematurely, and further research must be done to examine findings. All participants declared that these sessions were helpful, displaying a unanimous agreement. Six out of eight sessions were described by the participants as resulting in emotional change resulting in a 75% accuracy. Two sessions did not result in emotional change, but response was shared to be helpful to keep the participants mind off anxiety.

Keywords: art therapy, school art therapy, adolescents, expressive therapies continuum (ETC), emotional regulation, process.
Introduction

Art therapy is a non-verbal exploration of media that can provide support for a client who is unable to verbalize difficulties and needs through talk therapy. This therapeutic process utilizes sensory stimulation to investigate topics of personal significance and self-expression. Kearns (2004) found that art therapy provided improvements in behavior, mood, and focus (p. 94-96). Art therapy can include a variety of media such as but not limited to: acrylic paint, watercolors, oil pastels, pencils, markers, clay, textiles, collage, and charcoal. Each media contains unique properties, techniques of use, and connection to the body while creating. These properties and relationship to the self is called the expressive therapies continuum (ETC) in art therapy practice.

Lusebrink, Martinsone, & Dzikna-Sikova (2013) stated, “The focus of art therapy in the context of the expressive therapies continuum (ETC) is to emphasize and enhance the client’s strengths on different levels, while at the same time addressing problems on levels which may display variation in visual expressions…related to other areas of their life (p. 81).” It is the art therapist’s duty to use a variety of strategies with media to help clients reach further understanding, clarify strengths, and possible blockages in emotional functioning. It is important to pay to attention to client interaction with the media used as well as art therapy interventions.

An area of further research needed in the field is the healing evidence of the expressive therapies continuum (ETC) in various settings. There is a lack of research providing examples in the field for a therapist in training to follow. This investigation expands the research of expressive therapies providing two case studies. This inquiry explored three female students in a therapeutic day school setting, the effectiveness of the ETC, and emotional regulation. This research tested how the selection of art materials impacts the emotional regulation of students in
a therapeutic day school? The goal of the research was for the participants to gain awareness of themselves through the process of art making and to gain insight into emotional regulation. The research findings and surveys were shared with their clinical team and used for future coping support.

The method of study included a pre-session survey, five art therapy sessions, and a post-session survey. The pre-session survey included a questionnaire of preferred and nonpreferred art materials and emotional connection to art making. Next, the writer met with the two clients for five weeks. The writer tested and worked with the students for five thirty-minute sessions including fifteen minutes of art making and fifteen minutes of surveying. The goal of the survey was to have the students select art materials based on their current emotion and to test whether there was emotional change after art making. The post-survey included a questionnaire of emotions connected to art materials and learned content. Surveys and sessions consisted of important considerations to the student’s accommodations in their individualized education plans (IEPs) such as font size, wording of questions, and spacing on the page.

Throughout the process, the researcher wrote down observations as a witness to art making and notes of the sessions throughout. These findings were to be kept in a journal for reflection. The writer shared these observations with the students and encouraged them to notice aspects within themselves throughout the process as well. Also, the writer closed each session with response art of their own to debrief and mimic body language and artistic rhythms of the student. Providing evidence of the expressive therapies continuum (ETC) in a thorough case study was beneficial to the field of expressive therapies. Step-by-step evidence created a clear understanding for other researchers to analyze and built upon.
Literature Review

In order to properly educate the researcher, it was imperative to consider the following topics: considerations in using the expressive therapies continuum (ETC), art therapy in school settings and at-risk youth, the relationship between art making and emotional regulation, and effectiveness in art therapy and choice. Keeping these vital topics in mind allowed the researcher to further develop formation for further testing with two students in a therapeutic school setting.

Considerations in Using the ETC

Hinz (2008) expressed many common mistakes made by beginning art therapists, such as following the “trust the process” approach but ignoring the power of art therapy. Although spontaneous art making can be beneficial, it also misguides the use of art and could potentially harm the clients. Allowing the client to choose their own materials can be vital knowledge in assessing which level of the expressive therapies continuum (ETC) is in their comfort level. Hinz discussed the importance of balance between the therapist as expert and client as expert. She also elaborated on the common goals sought after by beginning art therapists such as self-esteem and expression (Hinz, 2008, p.38). She also expanded how a no-fail approach is a superficial treatment goal as the therapeutic process can carry much weight.

This article allowed me to visualize common mistakes made by new therapists and to think outside the box. It is vital information for therapists in training to understand and avoid. It also provided proper feedback and support of how effective the ETC can be when used correctly and when the appropriate knowledge is attained.

Hinz (2015) provided a real case in using the ETC in treatment with twenty-six-year-old Ashley, a patient at an addiction treatment program. Hinz discussed the client’s comfort with the cognitive and symbolic level of the expressive therapies continuum (ETC) using collage. Hinz
(2015) discussed and conversed with the client about the different levels of the ETC, especially the affective component to help encourage access of emotion. Hinz next introduced watercolor and paint, inviting her to explore emotion through color, but also accessing her comfort in symbolism. This allowed the art to be non-threatening and allowed room to grow at a comforting pace. It was greatly helpful to visualize how Hinz, an experienced therapist, accessed the ETC to provide growth, understanding, and therapeutic development toward recovery. Hinz (2015) concluded, “The ETC is a model that helps clarify how clients process information to form images during interaction with art materials. The ETC proposed a model that frames a practical way of working with clients in art therapy” (p.49). This research lays the groundwork for therapists to use the ETC as a guide to provide opportunities for growth.

In conclusion, both articles allowed a framework for research. The authors encouraged important conversations to have with clients in order to allow growth. Emotional regulation with the use of the ETC is supported when used appropriately. The articles describe effectively what a case study using the ETC would look like for this research development.

Art Therapy in School Settings and At-Risk Youth

Building art therapy programs and challenges.

Nelson (2010) described the development of a creative arts therapy program in New Jersey public schools to meet to needs of urban students. She described the obstacles in developing the program in a large school district. Nelson illustrated the common struggles of urban students such as poverty, hunger, distrust, substance abuse, and violence. Many of these students have fewer interactions with peers due to these dangers (Nelson, 2010, p. 62). The program considered the children’s difficulty operating within a typical school district and rules of conduct. These programs valued and modeled teaching safety, trust, improving negative
behavior, and also safe support. These programs allowed the students to grow, gain perspective of themselves and others, and build healthy relationships - especially within themselves (Nelson, 2010, p. 66).

One challenge shared by the author was the issue of funding. Nelson (2010) shared scenarios where pay cuts happen in the school system due to students, who quality for special services like special education, transferring to other school districts. This caused issues such as overloading a small number of creative arts therapists to a large case of students. These ratios did not allow the therapists to provide proper service (Nelson, 2010, p. 67). This evidence is imperative to the writer’s research subjects and understanding the world of the adolescent population. It is also a window into the world of how the expressive therapies can benefit this population. Goals of this work can help set the foundation to further research. How do other schools incorporate the expressive therapies? How does the success of the students compare?

**Results of Art Therapy Programs and Experimental Studies.**

McDonald, Holttum, and Drey (2019) described changes in children’s social, emotional, and mental health in an exploratory study of school-based art therapy. The authors quoted, “In July 2017 the Children’s Commissioner for England published new analysis suggesting the scale of vulnerability among children in England including 800,000 children identified as suffering from mental health difficulties (p.125).” This statistic reveals that many children need significantly more support and care. It is greatly problematic. The authors suggested the implication of art therapy in England school systems to test improvement of mental health.

McDonald, Holttum, and Drey’s (2019) study included 45 children and 10 teachers including pre-study and post-study interviews and questionnaires. The study investigated four questions: (a) reasons for referral, (b) significant changes in strength and difficulties in
questionnaires, (c) teacher’s perceptions, and (d) children’s perceptions (McDonald, Holttum, and Drey, 2019, p. 127). Results shared positive perceived changes in the social, emotional, and mental health difficulties of children, and reduced hyperactivity. Students also shared that making and thinking about the art making process was the most helpful. Also, that the art therapy room was calm, safe, happy, and relaxed (McDonald, Holttum, and Drey, 2019, p. 135). In order to properly understand the possibilities of art therapy-based school interventions, larger sample sizes and multiple studies must be tested.

Wallace-DiGarbo and Hill (2006) described their exploratory study testing art as agency to empower at risk youth. The study was comprised of 12 middle school students. The goals included empowerment through self-expression of art making and community building. The authors quoted, “The discipline of art increases confidence and raises self-esteem, critical factors in prosocial development. Creating art in the presence of a skilled guide offers a safe avenue for exploring life as well as a mean of expressing longing and hope” (p.119). These factors are vital in helping shape youth in understanding themselves, their emotional well-being, and confidence in their future. It sets the tone for future planning, goals and hope.

Wallace-DiGarbo and Hill’s (2006) method of study was a collaborative mural and group art making, including mask making, scribble art, creating mandalas, personal symbols, and journal writing. Materials included: pencils, journals, acrylic paint, charcoal, and plaster facilitated by a local artist. Results shared a 92% improved attitude and psychological adjustment in a six-month period (Wallace-DiGarbo and Hill, 2006, p. 122-122). Although there was a small sample size, this evidence provides significant support to the effectiveness of art therapy-based interventions with at risk and high school aged youth.
Kearns (2004) discussed poor performance in the classroom setting and difficulty focusing due to struggles assimilating sensory input (SI). The author proposed a multisensory art therapy program to improve performance in attention and behavior. Kearns defined SI difficulties as auditory, tactile, vestibular, and hyper- and hypo-sensitivities as a long-lasting effect to learning and functioning (Kearns, 2004, p. 95-96). This hypothesis was tested with one participant using three opportunities for art therapy interventions including oil-based clay work, finger painting, and easel painting within a ten-week period. The study compared outcomes of morning routines with and without art materials.

The goal was to balance structure and sensory integration to maximize the child’s engagement in the classroom setting. Results were positive in support of art therapy interventions and productivity of the classroom. Also, behavior was reported positive and appropriate with art therapy practices. Although this research provided constructive feedback in the collaboration of art therapy and structure of the school day, having a limited sample size limited its validity. Further research is suggested to create sound results. This article is a helpful tool to provide support for school systems in strengthening student engagement.

**Art Therapy and Choice**

Wiesel and Doron (2004) examined the therapy outcome of clients who chose the path of therapy after being educated on the modalities of the expressive therapies. These aspects of study allowed the client to educate themselves, encouraged motivation of self-growth as the client is playing an active role in entering therapy, and increased client satisfaction. Twenty undergraduates were tested ranging in age from 22 to 31, meeting one session per week for one hour for 3.6 months. Each participant could test out each modality for fifteen minutes, including art, bibliotherapy, journal writing, dance, and drama therapies. Then the participants were asked
to select a medium of choice. Participants were later interviewed about the process a month after therapy was terminated (Wiesel and Doron, 2004, p. 262-263).

Regardless of the chosen modality, the process was perceived as difficult but illuminating. The author’s (2004) quoted, “exposure was always difficult for me, showing my family photos to a stranger required a lot of guts, yet I felt I gained control but showing it... (p. 265)”. This confidence and control based in choice, resulted in positive outcomes for many participants resulting in positive self-efficacy. Also, given choice, clients were more comfortable in the therapeutic alliance. This allowed clients to dig deeper and develop a sense of trust (Wiesel and Doron, 2004, p.266). What if the clients got to choose more than one modality? Or allowed more time in processing and experimenting modalities? Would the results be different?

Entering therapy, many clients feel intimidated and self-conscious. Allowing clients to have a piece of control and choice in what the process will look for them encourages empowerment, growth, trust, and opportunity. It sets the stage for success. Wiesel and Doron’s (2004) research shared a basis of understanding how choice can impact therapy. In order to properly investigate this research, other populations must also be tested. What if a population has trouble making a choice? How would different populations engage with this vulnerability?

Drake and Hodge (2015) researched short-term effects of emotional regulation with one’s preference of drawing or writing. The researchers were interested particularly with the impacts of positive emotions and overall well-being. Drake and Hodge selected the medium based on existing research pertaining to emotional benefits of writing and drawing. The author’s shared evidence of the mediums ability to take negative emotions and positively discharge the feelings through creative expression (Drake & Hodge, 2015, p.27). To test these aspects themselves, the researcher’s conducted a survey of 80 undergraduate students, asked about their preference of
medium, and then divided them into groups. Half of the sample was placed in their preferred activity and the other half non-preferred. The participants were then showed a six-minute clip from a movie to bring forth negative emotions. Participants were then asked to rate their emotions on a scale and then to use assigned media for 10 minutes to do whatever they would like. After, the participants were surveyed again (Drake & Hodge, 27-28). Results proved drawing to be for effective agent of mood elevation and there was no correlation to preferred and non-preferred activity. Although the research provided a framework for positive improvement of mood using expressive media, more research is suggested to support the data. What would the results look like without the showing of the negative film? It is possible the viewing of that film would result in negative emotions long-term which contradicts the researchers’ interest in overall well-being.

Kaimal and Ray (2017) investigated the impact of visual art making in an open art therapy setting in connection to affect and self-efficacy. The study consisted of 39 adults, ages 19 to 59, engaged in individual art making for a one-hour session facilitated by an art therapist. Questionnaires of positive and negative affects and efficacy were provided before and after art making. Surveys also asked questions due to level of experience in the art making experience. Participant could choice between collage, clay or markers in any kind of imagery (Kaimal and Ray, p. 156-157).

Kaimal and Ray’s (2017) findings support that a majority of the participants’ positive affect and self-efficacy improved. However, for three participants, levels did not change. No significant results were shown in experience in art making and skills. Given the opportunity to engage in three choices many participants did not identify as an artist but many of the
participants shared that they enjoyed the process. Many participants even took their art home
(Kaimal and Ray, p. 164).

Kaimal and Ray’s (2017) study provided feedback to the impact of choice in and artistic self-expression. What would the results have looked like if more media choices were provided? What would have the results have looked like if the study was prolonged to multiple sessions? What if further studies were conducted between artist and non-artists? Both studies provide a start in supportive feedback of artistic choice, expression, and self-confidence. Studies provided positive outcomes in the creation of art and mood elevations. In order to process more clearly more evidence must be gathered with different populations, media, and larger sample sizes.

Art Making and Emotion Regulation

Results of Emotional Support Due to Art Making.

Chilton, Gerber, Bechtel, Councill, Dryer, and Yingling (2015) researched what happens emotionally, cognitively, creatively, and relationally in the therapeutic alliance in the process of creating positive emotions. The authors wanted to observe what patterns, colors, stories, and themes emerged throughout the process. Art-based research was conducted with five art therapists as participants in the Mid Atlantic Area of the United States. The participants were asked to create an art piece about how they were feeling in the moment and then to create a second piece based on a positive emotion (Chilton, Gerber, Bechtel, Councill, Dyer, and Yingling, p. 14). The art therapists then created response art to reflect on the process and shared it with participants.

Chilton, Gerber, Bechtel, Councill, Dryer, and Yingling’s (2015) results were shared to emotionally change over time within the creative process of creating in the moment, positively, and then sharing of response art. Symbols of positivity were examined to be analogous between
participants. There was also similar coloration between the two artistic expressions. Chilton, Gerber, Bechtel, Councill, Dryer, and Yingling’s (2015) participant quoted, “it felt good to make a piece focusing just on positive emotion from the initial piece, it made that emotion larger and more real…. I feel like I have a little for insight (p.21).” Response art shared with the participants also resulted in a positive feeling of empathy and connection between participants and the therapist.

This article is interesting insight to research. How would this study have been different if the participants were not also art therapists? It is an interesting method to research among fellow art therapists before utilizing the research in the field. The art therapists were able to access insight into the world of themselves and possible clients. How would this research, symbols, color choice, and results change with different populations? Would it be difficult for specific populations to create a positive image?

**Results of Emotional Support of Art Making with Specific Populations.**

Haeyen, Kleijiberg and Hinz (2018) used their article to share qualitative research to analyze art therapy for patients diagnosed with personality disorders and impacts of emotions regulation. Seventy-four adult patients were recruited to the study from waitlists of personality disorder (PD) outpatient treatment centers. Eight patients were chosen to participate in the study consisting of one weekly group art therapy for ten weeks. The authors (2018) expressed that art inventions consisted of themes of (a) mindfulness, (b) emotional regulation, (c) self-education and insight, and (d) cohesion of interpersonal skills. Results proved that art therapy interventions allowed for a safe space to confront emotions and dig below the surface. These group sessions allowed for the clients to open up in exploring themselves and to share with others.
Haeyen, Kleijiberg, and Hinz (2018) quoted a client’s response and shared, “When I feel very angry. Then I need to be able to work with nails and with things that well, almost are stinging and if I want to create a sense of security, then I will go very much with pink colours and with fluffy stuff and feathers and those kinds of things. So that’s very different (p. 161).” These findings and insight are an important impact to the field and support of the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC). This research supports that helping clients with art therapy directives and exploration of media helps clients use the insight found to apply it in support of emotional regulation.

Holmqvist, Jormfeldt, Larsson, & Persson (2017) used their article to also present qualitative research in women’s experiences of emotional change in response to art therapy techniques. Seventeen adult women with a wide range of physical symptoms and diagnoses participated in the study. The process included individual and group art therapy. The women were then asked to bring one image that was important to them and filled out a self-report questionnaire. The author (2017) expressed that participants revealed some result of internal change and others with no change. The authors quoted,” The women who experienced turning points described a sudden, unexpected insight when viewing the image, a sense of surprise or amazement, strong feelings of sorrow or anger but also hope. They experience having understood something important that led to a new approach to life (p. 203).” Some expressed also feeling support and insight from the group for internal change. This evidence depicting internal change as a result of group and individual art therapy is extremely important in exploring the field of art therapy. This data indicates that creating art can provide emotional support, insight, and coping skills of emotional regulation.
Method

In order to research the effectiveness in using the expressive therapies continuum (ETC) to support emotional regulation, the writer investigated these art therapy techniques with three female students in a therapeutic day school setting. The researcher met with the students for five weeks, meeting for about 45 minutes in each session. The sessions included 15 of surveying and up to a half hour of art making. Surveys and sessions consisted of important considerations to the student’s accommodations in their individualized education plans (IEPs) such as font size, wording of questions, and spacing on the page.

The participants of the study included three female students in a therapeutic day setting. Each of the student’s Individualized Education Plan’s (IEP’s) included progress of emotional regulation and utilization of coping skills throughout the school day. The students presented problems included anxiety, depression, difficulties with interpersonal relationships and communication with peers, self-doubt, and limited ability to access coping skills when in crisis. The participants often displayed symptoms anxiety, panic attacks, and depressive episodes.

Setting and Environment

The sessions took place in the art therapy studio or art therapy office at the therapeutic day school, depending on availability. Each student’s surveys and artwork were filed safely in the art studio. During each session close attention was payed to the students’ body language, breathing, communication, and presence. Notes were taken and cataloged in the researcher’s journal. To debrief each session, the researcher and art therapist created response art which was kept in a journal.
Surveying and Formal Testing

The session included three types of surveys including: (a) a pre-session survey, (b) emotional regulation survey, and (c) post session survey. Examples of the surveys can be found in the appendix in the final pages of this capstone. On the first session with each student filled out a pre-session survey identifying art materials used before and materials that are most beneficial. This survey was meant to educate the researcher on each students’ comfort with the arts and their favorite art materials. This information also allowed the researcher to gage how much education and support each student would need.

Next, an emotional regulation survey was given. The survey asked the students to identify (a) their current emotion, (b) possible rationales for emotion, (c) and an art material that would be helpful. Together, the researcher and student discussed the expressive therapies continuum (ETC) and qualities of each art material. The students were asked to choose a sensory material, cognitive material, or symbolic material based on their emotion in the current moment. Sensory materials included looming with thread, clay, sand tray, and watercolors. Cognitive materials included pencils, collage, or sharpie. Symbolic materials included paint, colored pencils, oil, and chalk pastels. Then, the student created for up to 30 minutes. Following art making the student was then asked to repeat identify (a) their current emotion, (b) whether there was emotional change, and (c) if the process was beneficial. This survey was repeated each session for the next five weeks.

On the last session, each student finally finished with a post-session survey. The survey asked each student to draw a line connecting an art material to an emotion. The goal of this survey was to examine knowledge and growth gained by the process. It was the researcher’s hope that each student could identify a material that may benefit the emotion experienced. This
knowledge of the self would hypothetically help to assist with emotional regulation and coping in the future. Each student would have a toolbox of art materials to utilize and empower them to give themselves support. These results were also shared with the student’s clinical teams to utilize in therapy and progress tracking.

**Results**

Due to high absenteeism this study only met for eight seven total sessions instead of the proposed fifteen. The post survey was also not completed as the study was terminated due to the COVID19. One participant of the study refused often, was hospitalized, and was suspended due to aggressive behavior. The researcher met with the other two participants of the study for three forty-five-minute sessions. Although the study did not persist the way the researcher intended, the study did result in positive results. All participants declared that these sessions were helpful, displaying a unanimous agreement. Six out of eight sessions were described by the participants as resulting in emotional change resulting in a 75% accuracy. Two sessions did not result in emotional change, but response was shared to be helpful to keep the participants mind off anxiety.

**Participant One**

Participant one was a sixteen-year-old female with a diagnosis of generalized anxiety disorder, autism spectrum disorder, and major depressive disorder. She presented as extremely mature for her age and demonstrated great insight of her emotions. The participant had a history of bullying and often had trouble functioning in social settings. The student had transferred to the therapeutic day school only a short time ago. The student expressed art as being a helpful coping mechanism and enjoyed the material of looming. The student chose looming for all three sessions she completed.
The student chose to meet with the researcher at 8:30am on Monday mornings in the art therapy office. She expressed that debriefing the weekend and the weaving process would help wake her up as she often struggled on Monday mornings returning to school. The loom was made out of a large hula hoop and was strung in a star pattern with hemp string. The student chose to use a two large spools of soft, thick thread of various blues both light and dark. The client alternated using the light and dark threads as she created wrapping the thread around her hand in long sections. The weaving technique was conveyed to provide a calming response as it was a repetitious process. The student voiced enjoying the texture of the string on her hands, which also was described to help her relax and become more alert.

The first and second session the student chose “tired” as her current emotion, the third anxious. To conclude, all three sessions the student expressed emotional change to relaxed and content. Throughout all three sessions, the student became much more alert after a few minutes of creating. Her body language changed from slouched and quiet to upright and social. She began to open up, talk about her interests, her routines, her worries, and her history. It was remarkable to witness. The art making became a catalyst for self-expression and self-confidence.

**Participant Two**

Participant two was an eighteen-year-old female with a diagnosis of generalized anxiety disorder, with depressive episodes and emetophobia, phobia of throwing up. Participant two, similar to Participant one, also was significantly mature for her age and insightful about her emotions. She had a significant history with mental health programs and supports systems. The student was a recent transfer to the therapeutic day school from public school. The student was also extremely interested in the arts and often created in her free time.
The client decided that Friday morning at 8:30 am would be most beneficial for her to meet. Due to absenteeism during cold season, the student’s most difficult time due to phobia fear and college visits, the researcher only completed three sessions. All sessions took place in the art therapy office, which she was very comfortable with as her clinician at the school was also an art therapist. The student stated feeling depressed and anxious the first two sessions and frustrated, quiet, and content the third. Following two of the sessions, she identified no emotional change, but that she benefitted from the process of art making. The third session, she identified feeling content after art making.

The student was very comfortable using different media and tended to use 4” x 6” perforated paper to create. She worked slowly and diligently progressively adding small detailed work. Her art making was symbolic and realistic, many times depicting water and nature as she identified it as soothing for her. The student expressed using “formal art technique” such as shading, highlights, and shadows allowed her to tune in, focus, and engage. When creating her body language and breathing slowed and body was hunched placing her hand on her face and leaned on the table. In all three sessions, she wrapped herself in a blanket which she identified as a coping mechanism. The student was very social and open about what was going on with her and shared her happenings with ease. Rapport was built quickly and strongly.

She was extremely interested in participating in this study and frequently asked questions about the researcher. She enjoyed being a helper and supporting the research of the art therapy field. All three sessions were identified as helpful for the student. She also utilized the skills of the study to carry through the art room frequently throughout times of stress for her. Overall, the session with the client seemed to carry through and support the students individualized education plan (IEP).
Participant Three

Participant three was a sixteen-year-old female with a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder. Her mood was frequently dysregulated, often coming from home either very upset or overly energetic. Participant three was the most difficult and inconsistent. Due to the combination of her diagnosis and complicated behavior, refusal to meet, hospitalization, and suspension, the researcher only met with the client for the study for one session.

The student identified as enjoying art making, especially sensory media such as clay, model magic, and slime. The student was highly critical of herself especially when art making. Often, she would create and destroy or abandon her art after only a few minutes when in the art room. The student was very open to sharing what was on her mind and her needs. The researcher talked very openly with the student about the connection to her Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and how the environment of the session was intended to support her. The student was extremely excited to participate in the researcher’s study and to be in a helper role. The client decided that Wednesday morning at 8:45am would be most beneficial for her.

The client identified as feeling content at the start of the session, having had a good night at home and plenty of sleep. The client was very persistent in wanting to meet in the art room and not the art therapy office. She voiced being much more comfortable in the space. She chose to work on the wheel with clay, in the back corner of the art room. She spoke about wanting to feel something in her hands. The client was process oriented, not worrying about what the piece looked like. This behavior was outside her normal thinking process in the art room day to day. She shared that it was a beneficial process for her and would love to do it again. To close the session, the client identified emotional change, feeling for relaxed and focused after the session.
Discussion

The study resulted in positive results with all participant response were found to be unanimously helpful. Due to COVID-19, the study was terminated prematurely, and further research must be done to examine findings. It would also be interesting to extend this study with the three students selected throughout the year, to examine whether the study impacted Individual Educational Plan (IEP) progress. In order to identify the correlation between art making and emotional regulation, a more complex sample must be investigated. Would the study have been successful with a male population? Would the study have been success for those who do not identify as artist? What would the result have looked like if the study continued? What would the results look like if there was a larger sample size? What would the results look like if another researcher replicated the study? What would the results of the study be with participants exhibiting a variety of diagnoses? What insight would the post survey have provided if the study was not terminated?

Self-Response & Response Art

Throughout the process of this study, the researcher completed response art to reflect upon each session. Sometimes, the research mimicked the imagery or colors in the student’s art making or processes. Other pieces were inspired by the session or an emotional response to the feeling of the session. While the researcher was creating response art, body language and media choice was often mimicked of the student. Art making was attempted to directly follow each session or as soon as possible in order to remember vivid details of the sessions. The researcher also attempted to embody the emotional state of the students when creating.

The process of creating response art for the researcher was extremely beneficial in entering the world of each student. The researcher was able to sense what the method might have
been like or the students. At times the researcher felt uncomfortable maintaining the body language and emotions of the students. It was difficult to remain focused at times, feeling unnatural in the body. Overall, this process was powerful and beneficial for the researcher.

**Participant One Response Art.**

![Participant One Response Art](image)

**Figure 1. Session One Response.**

The piece was created after session one with participant one. The researcher started by cutting and wrapping the string as the participant did throughout the session. The researcher closed her eyes to embody what the process may have felt like. The researcher next slowly placed the string on the page organically, without a plan. This process replicated the flow of the session as rapport was built naturally. Slowly the string was spread and overlapped across the page and hot glued in place. Lastly, line work was added to the crossing of overlapping string to represent rapport building and connection to the participant and researcher.
Figure 2. Session Two Response.

This piece was created after session two with participant one. The research was inspired by the circular pattern of the collage image of two boats creating waves in the water. The circular motion of the boats mimicked the circular shape of the hula hoop and looming pattern. This also mimicked the organic flow of the relationship and session. The two faces represented the researcher and client, the client with text “RETHINK” across the face. The word represented the change found in the participant while creating and change of attitude. Creating seemed to allow the client to greatly open up in this session and she began share more of herself, especially her strengths. This session seemed to be a pivotal moment of success.
Figure 3. Session Three Response.

The last piece was created as a response to the last session and time together. The researcher created a miniature loom to resemble the work of the participant. First a start pattern was created and hot glued using hem string, the same used to create the original loom. The string was wrapped in an over under pattern using first the lighter blue thread and then a string of darker blue thread. In response some of the words used throughout the session was written on the left page of the researcher’s journal, including repetition, calming, grounding, and tired.
Participant Two Response Art.

Figure 4. Session One Response.

This piece was created after the first session with participant two. It was inspired by her calming landscape, depicting a place she knew and a place that brought her peace. Throughout the session the client discussed creating calming landscapes as a common coping mechanism for her. The response was created in a similar fashion as the process of the participant. First blue was place down in water acrylic paint from the top and moving slowly down to the bottom. Slight variation of color as added as shading in the sky and water. Lastly, trees and a ground line were added using a small brush in black in the middle of the page. A sun was the final touch to complete the piece. Creating this calming image was also reflected as calming for the researcher.
Figure 5. Session Two Response.

This piece was created after the second session with participant two. This piece also mimicked the method of the participant creating a very similar image in response. The researcher created three pieces of fruit starting the top pear, next the middle apple, and then the bottom lemon. The researcher worked slowly with watercolor to create shading slowly, trying to focus on the formal technique described by the client. On the left-hand side of the page, the researcher wrote words that were shared by the client throughout the session such as pulsing anxiety, focusing on distracting the mind, and rigidity.
The last piece was created in response to session three with participant two. Unlike the previous two responses this piece did not mimic the process of the client. The piece was created in response to the feeling overall of the time with the participant. The researcher felt the sessions with this client were a holding space for growth as the client was so insightful about her mental health. The piece represented the warm feeling in the room with the client and the blending process and coloration of her art making.
Participant Three Response Art.

Figure 7. Session One Response.

This piece was created after the only session with participant three. It was inspired by the participants disorganized energy and exploration of identity. It was created in response to the goals the researcher had for the participant and the approaches to the work. Goals and conversation in the session were framed for self-awareness, processed based art making, and art making for the self. The researcher was exploring the sense of identity of the participant.

The piece was created with collage and sharpie. The researcher cut out the face of the figure to represent the lost feeling and sense of self of the participant. The researcher next filled the blank space of the face with a sharpie drawing of chaotic patterns.
Final Response Art

Figure 8. Final Closure Response.

A final piece was created in response to the study as a whole. The piece was created on a piece of 2’ by 3’ sheet of black paper. The researcher used all of the artistic media used by the participants throughout the year including acrylic paint, water soluble oil pastels, soft strands of string, colored pencils, palette knives, and paint pens.

The researcher started the process with a self-portrait in the media of acrylic paint. This media was a catalyst for processing the self through the research study. Painting is also the media of most comfort for the researcher and a media that the researcher would have proposed to choose if they were participating as a subject in this study. The portrait was created slowly and diligently adding small details until satisfied with realistic tendencies. Lastly, the face was framed with white colored pencil to create hair.
The researcher next worked in a clockwise circle next creating with water soluble oil pastels of oranges, reds, yellows, and whites. Using a paint brush and water the researcher blended the colors slowly and layering back with the pastel again. The oil pastel worked to frame the right side of the face and chin. Oil pastel was inspired by participant two’s artistic process.

The next media chosen was acrylic paint of blues and whites applied to the paper using palette knives. The researcher alternated with each color pressing the palette knives down on the page and working in a left to right motion. The colors were layered in a fluid fashion starting from the left side of the chin and traveling up to the left side of the portrait. The blues were inspired by participant one’s use of blue string, participant two’s landscapes and sky scenes, and participant three’s liking of sensory media.

Next the researcher used textured string to create the upper left-hand portion of the paper, framing the left side of the forehead. The researcher worked slowly and organized to create small looped designed of thread. Each piece was adhered carefully with hot glue. Lastly, small green pieces of thread were cut in strips and placed throughout randomly to fill in gaps. This section was inspired by the looming process and sensory stimulation of participant one.

Lastly, the research used a variety of colored paint pens on the upper right-hand side of the face. This process was inspired by participant two’s “formal art technique” and sketching tendencies. While creating the researcher tried to embody the entire body to focus in on creating as the participant described her process was like. Slowly the intricate details were added working first close the face and extending outward to the edge of the paper.

Thoughts of gratitude and inspiration circled through the mind of the researcher. There was a sense of calm and determination while creating. Surrounding the self-portrait in the center
of the piece, the research used all the media used throughout the study by the students in session. This was a commemoration and an ode to the thankfulness of each student for participating.
References


APPENDIX

Surveys

**Note Font Size and Spacing differed in use of session due to Individual Education Plan (IEP) Accommodations**

NAME: ___________________________ DATE: __________

PRE-SESSION SURVEY

1. What materials have you used before?
   - □ Clay
   - □ Oil Pastel
   - □ Watercolor
   - □ Charcoal
   - □ Pencil
   - □ Chalk Pastel
   - □ Marker
   - □ Collage
   - □ Acrylic Paint
   - □ Sand tray
   - □ Other: ___________________________

2. What material do you gravitate toward or find the most beneficial? Why?

3. What is your least favorite? Why?

4. Do you find a connection between creating and your emotions?
Art Therapy & Emotional Regulation Survey

Name:

1. Select your current emotional state:
   □ Depressed       □ Frustrated
   □ Energetic       □ Angry
   □ Happy           □ Content
   □ Sad             □ Quiet
   □ Anxious         □ Anxious
   □ Other:

2. Why? Anything that promoted that emotion?

3. Select an art material you think would be helpful
   □ Clay
   □ Oil Pastel
   □ Watercolor      □ Charcoal
   □ Pencil          □ Chalk Pastel
   □ Marker          □ Collage
   □ Acrylic Paint   □ Sand tray
   □ Other:

4. Why?

POST ART MAKING SURVEY

5. Select your current emotional state:
   □ Depressed       □ Frustrated
   □ Energetic       □ Angry
   □ Happy           □ Content
   □ Sad             □ Quiet
   □ Anxious         □ Anxious
   □ Other:

6. Did you experience any emotional change through the art making process?
   □ Yes             □ No
   If yes, can you explain?

7. Anything else you want to share about the process?

8. Was this helpful for you?
   □ Yes             □ No
   Can you explain?
NAME: <br>DATE:<br><br>POST-SURVEY<br>Connect the art material to an emotion:<br>☐ Clay ☐ Depressed<br>☐ Watercolor ☐ Frustrated<br>☐ Pencil ☐ Energetic<br>☐ Marker ☐ Angry<br>☐ Acrylic Paint ☐ Happy<br>☐ Oil Pastel ☐ Content<br>☐ Charcoal ☐ Sad<br>☐ Chalk Pastel ☐ Quiet<br>☐ Collage ☐ Anxious<br>☐ Sand tray ☐ Other:<br>☐ Other: