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## Group Curriculum Combining Expressive Arts Therapy & Rainbowdance: A Literature Review

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Group Curriculum Combining Expressive Arts Therapy & Rainbowdance: A Literature Review

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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Expressive Arts Therapy

Professor Elizabeth Kellogg

### Abstract

This thesis presents a 10-week curriculum for a short-term expressive arts therapy group for children ages 6-7 (grades 1 & 2). The curriculum is unique in that it combines the dance/movement therapy program of Rainbowdance with expressive arts therapy. The targeted population sub-group for this proposed curriculum is children whose caregivers, teachers, or guidance counselors have expressed concerns about isolation and/or a lack of social skills. The purpose of this proposed curriculum is to develop the social skills essential for making friends and building relationships. More specifically, group members will gain skills in building a sense of community, sharing, taking turns, taking another's perspective, and developing empathy. The facilitator will use a combination of visual art, music, movement, and play therapy activities to experience and process these skills. In addition, each week the session will begin and close with a Rainbowdance circle ritual. This capstone thesis reviews the literature that supports the reasoning for the development of this curriculum.

## Curriculum for Combining Expressive Arts Therapy with Rainbowedance: A Literature Review

**Introduction**

According to Broderick and Blewitt (2010), friendship development is the most prominent need of children ages 5-9 during middle childhood. When children start to learn skills such as perspective taking and empathy, they can engage in more intimate and mutual relationships and solve problems in a way that takes others' interests into consideration (Broderick & Blewitt, 2010). In order to develop and maintain friendships, children need to learn and implement social skills such as sharing with others, resolving conflicts, apologizing, and playing cooperatively (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). I have developed a curriculum that combines expressive arts therapy with Rainbowedance in order to strengthen these skills to help children create crucial social relationships during this developmental period.

Expressive arts therapy can take various definitions; Natalie Rogers (1993), a pioneer in creative and expressive arts and daughter of humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers, defined expressive arts therapy as the use of “various arts—movement, drawing, painting, sculpting, music, writing, sound, and improvisation—in a supportive setting to facilitate growth and healing. It is a process of discovering ourselves through any art form that comes from an emotional depth” (Rogers, 1993, p.2). As Rogers stressed, expressive arts therapy is not simply about creating beautiful pictures or stage-ready dance or music performances, but rather it is the act of expressing our feelings through various media and exploring our inner realm (Rogers, 1993). Keith Davis further expanded upon Roger's definition and reported that as opposed to analyzing a creative product, expressive arts therapy emphasizes supporting the internal and therapeutic *processes* of the creation and expression of art making (Davis, 2010). Recently, Suzanne Degges-White (2020) provides a benefit of expressive arts therapy: “the expressive arts

represent multiple modes and channels of communication that provide individuals the opportunity to share and connect with others in ways that verbal communication may not... The clinical application of the creative arts creates an environment in which multilayered self-discovery experiences can take place” (Degges-White, p. 217, 2020). Expressive arts therapy encompasses all of these definitions and will be discussed further of how it is beneficial for children.

Rainbowdance is a dance/movement therapy program for children ages 1-6, created by Dicki Johnson Macy BC-DMT, M. Ed., LMHC (Macy, 1989). Rainbowdance is endorsed by the Boston Children’s Foundation, and encourages the development of peer relationship, trust, competency and attachment through the use of movement, song, gesture, rhythm and ritual. As Macy stated, “Rainbowdance has been designed to help children... form positive attachments with excitement and hope, to explore their environments, to develop relationships, and to internalize the memory of affiliation” (Johnson Macy, p. 4, 2018).

I participated in two weekend-long training courses to become certified in both the Basic Rainbowdance Training, as well as the Rainbowdance Preschool Program. I fell in love with this program as it enhances self-regulation, self-esteem, and social empathy. It was my passion for Rainbowdance that inspired me to develop a curriculum that combines it with expressive arts therapy for young children. Due to the current COVID-19 global pandemic, I was unable to implement my curriculum in-person. However, I have conducted extensive research that supports the potential benefits and importance of a social skills therapy group based in expressive arts and Rainbowdance. The philosophy and structure of Rainbowdance, along with other developmental and expressive arts considerations, will be further described in the following literature review.

## Literature Review

This literature review will provide evidence for the benefits of using of expressive art, visual art, dance/movement, and music therapies with children. I will then present an overview of my proposed curriculum, which uses a variety of creative arts activities; the complete curriculum is attached as an appendix at the end of the thesis. Afterwards, I will discuss the structure of my curriculum, and will provide developmental concepts supporting *why* the specific skills and goals are important for the proposed population. Finally, I will go into detail about the philosophies and benefits of Rainbowdance. Each section of this literature review will support the reasoning for the development of my expressive arts Rainbowdance curriculum.

### Expressive Arts

A study by Cindy Lou Nelson (2010) provided evidence of her successful integration of an expressive arts therapy program into a school system. Led by a team comprised of an art therapist, music therapist, and licensed clinical social worker, the school system showed positive effects on children with and without special needs. The program consisted of 8 weekly sessions in which students participated in a 1-hour expressive arts therapy session once a week during the school day. This program was unique because it included multiple modes of expression, including activities in musical composition, drawing, singing, music making, drumming circles, and free expression. Over the course of the program, teachers noticed an increase in the students' interpersonal skills and prosocial behaviors. Nelson (2010) also reported an increase in student emotional coping skills, self-confidence, and ability to manage transitions (Nelson, 2010). No one singular mode of expression is best for all children (Degges-White, 2020), and the versatility of the arts allows for an integration of multiple modalities which I have included in the development of my curriculum.

### ***Visual Arts***

One of the forms that expressive arts can take is through visual mediums. The visual arts are comprised of a variety of forms of art-making, including painting, drawing, collage making, sculpting, and photography (Degges-White, 2020). According to the American Art Therapy Association (2019), art therapy is effective in improving areas of emotional, physical, and psychological function by means of enhancing self-awareness, conflict resolution, social skills, and cognitive and sensorimotor development (AATA, 2019). Encouraging the use of visual arts can provide children a nonverbal outlet through which to express themselves. Art therapy literature indicates that various methods and media can be beneficial for all people regardless of age or presentation. Additionally, different art media provide different sensory experiences, which influences the understanding of emotion and the development of memory (Hinz, 2009). I have therefore offered multiple different textures and art materials in my curriculum when possible.

### ***Dance/Movement***

Erfer and Ziv (2006) reported that dance/movement therapy (DMT) is a beneficial therapeutic modality for children because children typically learn about the world through body experiences, which then helps their social, physical, emotional, communicative, and cognitive development. Movement is a form of communication, and DMT enables children to engage in a non-verbal, meaningful dialogue with themselves, others, and their environment. DMT assists in developing self-awareness, which can then lead to awareness of others and development of social skills such as sharing, communication, cooperation, and self-expression (Erfer & Ziv, 2006). Self-expression through movement and dance helps facilitate communication and processing of emotions and experiences that are too complex or deep for words alone (Kourkouta et al., 2014).

Dance/movement therapy pioneer Marian Chace developed methods and principles that have become the basis for DMT theories (Sandel, Chaiklin, & Lohn, 1993). One of these principles – “empathic reflection” or “mirroring” – is used in week 9 of my proposed curriculum in order for the group members to fully attune and connect with one another. This attunement will help foster feelings of empathy and sensitive cooperation. Mirroring is a DMT principle where the participants are met on their level and exist in the here-and-now. Mirroring allows for engagement in nonjudgmental movement interactions that help provide a sense of safety, trust, and acceptance (Erfer & Ziv, 2006).

### ***Music***

Anita Swanson (2020) reported that music therapists use the elements of music and the way that music affects people to improve social, cognitive, academic, spiritual, behavioral, emotional, and physical skills (Swanson, 2020). Music therapy has been found to be effective in improving social competence in children with social deficits (Gooding, 2011). Music positively impacts student success in school because it affects the brain and enhances cognition and attention, social functioning, expression, motivation, and communication (Swanson, 2020). The use of music can provide a structured environment to help people connect to one another and interact appropriately (Gaston, 1968). Music-making brings group members together by allowing for expression, communication, and sharing of common goals. Music therapy can increase a student’s self-esteem and assist them in creating friendships with other group members (Pavlicevic, O’Neil, Powell, Jones, & Sampathianaki, 2014).

While Rainbowdance is considered a *dance/movement* therapy program, it is also extremely intentional and informed about the incorporation of *music* into the rituals. Music therapy can facilitate mind-body health because music synchronizes body movement and creates

a feeling of being connected to something greater than oneself (Swanson, 2020). This is one of the goals of using Rainbowdance as a beginning and ending to each session in my proposed curriculum, because it will bring all of the group members together through music and movement. As Johnson Macy mentions, body movements are a child's most familiar form of self-expression, and they can also be used to access collective expression (Johnson, 2007).

People can convey care and empathy through music. Music therapy promotes social interactions with the hope of building positive relationships (Panksepp & Bernatzky, 2002). When used in therapy, music is motivating, organizing, and grounding which helps individuals actively interact with peers (Swanson, 2020). I see several parallels of music therapy components embedded in the Rainbowdance programming. Using music to structure a social experience can help people feel safe in their environment. For example, rhythm can be used to ground individuals to promote feelings of security, and group participation in the music experience provides support for each member to express themselves (Swanson, 2020).

### **Curriculum Overview**

The expressive arts Rainbowdance curriculum that I have developed utilizes music, creative movement, art, and play therapy techniques that facilitate skills required for social competence. Each week, a different creative modality is introduced with the aim of creating a therapeutic environment to encourage self- and group-expression. Beginning and ending each group with a Rainbowdance circle ritual will allow for safe group- and self-reflection. Below is a brief outline that summarizes each week of my curriculum and displays the scaffolding of goals. The complete curriculum can be found in the appendix.

***Week 1 – Introductions: Welcome!***

Group members will play a welcome activity to introduce themselves and get acquainted with one another, the facilitator, the space, and the invitation to create. Group members will learn the opening and closing Rainbowdance circle rituals that begin and end every session to create familiarity and safety while increasing self-esteem. They will also play a game to get to know each other. The first session will focus on creating connections between group members while providing an invitation to explore sensory art materials in a lighthearted, friendly environment.

***Week 2 – Community Building: Rock Sculptures***

Group members will create their own rock sculpture individually, and then will make one collectively. Group members will discuss their experience creating alone and then creating together. The goal of this session is to continue building a sense of community between group members, and to experience what it is like to all participate in a collaborative artistic creation.

***Week 3 – Community Building: Percussion & Painting***

Group members will explore musical instruments with each other and will then play with finger paint together on one large piece of paper. The objectives are for the group members to continue to build connections, open up creatively, and break through any remaining feelings of resistance surrounding creativity or openness.

***Week 4 – Community Building: “WEgo” Books***

Using visual art, group members will reflect on their positive traits, and what they have to offer to the group. They will creatively express their important qualities not only in this group, but also in other groups in different settings. A spin off of “ego” books, this activity is meant to build self-esteem by not only reflecting upon the positive traits the group members have, but also how those positive traits can help and contribute to the group as a whole.

***Week 5 – Sharing: The Rainbowfish***

The facilitator will read *The Rainbow Fish*, a story about a fish who finds friendship and happiness after learning to share. Group members will create their own “rainbow fish” together out of colorful dancing scarves. They will then play a lily pad freeze dance game in which they will move and dance around the room, and then freeze their bodies on lily pad-shaped cut out. The goal of this session is to educate the group members about the importance of sharing, while also providing them with engaging movement activities to encourage them to practice sharing.

***Week 6 – Taking Turns: Who’s Got the Turtle?***

Participants will gain experience taking turns through playing a fun group game. They will practice additional social skills such as eye contact, self-control, and asking questions. By participating in this activity, group members will practice waiting for their turn in a fun environment and gain a deeper understanding of the importance of taking turns with friends.

***Week 7 – Different Perspectives: The World Through Your Eyes***

Participants will use the visual arts to create a pair of paper glasses. Group members will notice that no two glasses look the same, and the facilitator will explain that different people have different perspectives. A discussion will follow about how people see the world differently, and that not everyone may feel the same way that you do in a situation. The goal of this session is to creatively explore the concept of differing perspectives, and to understand the importance of friends being able to think about another friend’s feelings.

***Week 8 – Different Perspectives/Empathy: Clay Apples***

Group members will develop a deeper understanding of different emotions, with discussion emphasizing that people may have different feelings in the same situation. Group members will be introduced to empathic thinking, a key factor in making friends. Through a

story-telling activity, the participants will identify and express different feelings and will improve skills for appropriately expressing and recognizing another's emotions.

### ***Week 9 – Empathy: You Are My Mirror***

Through a mirroring movement activity, group members will have the opportunity to attune to one another, developing feelings of cooperation and empathy. Group members will be fully attentive, engaged, and sensitive to each other. A discussion will follow to process why empathy is essential for close relationships and making friends. The objective of this session is for the group members to physically experience what it feels like to give all of their energy and attention to another person, experiencing the movements together.

### ***Week 10 – Termination: Aloha “Goodbye” Leis***

The facilitator will provide a positive creative experience of closure, as the group members have the opportunity to express their feelings surrounding termination. There will be space for reflections of favorite memories or important/ helpful aspects learned throughout the group, and a discussion about how to continue to use the skills moving forward. Group members will engage in one final art activity where they will create a lei, a symbol of their goodbye to the group. This final session will allow the group members to experience a healthy ending.

### **Structure of Curriculum**

I have chosen to introduce social skills (community building, sharing, taking turns, taking another's perspective, and empathy) in a particular order because they each build on one another. It would be ineffective to try to promote and develop empathy skills if the children had not created a bond or learned that different people have different feelings than them at different times. This progression stems from the view of Corey et al. (2018) on the use of appropriate exercises and techniques: “During the beginning stage of the group it is appropriate to use

interactive exercises that do not require deeply personal self-disclosure. As children and adolescents become more acquainted with the group process, the activities or exercises can become more challenging” (Corey et al., 2018, p. 347). For this reason, I have designated the first several sessions to work on goals of “community building,” as the activities will be exploratory and playful in nature in order to develop a secure environment to grow. Swan-Foster et al. (2001) explained that group therapy facilitators should expect resistance to art making early on, and to address this discomfort not by enforcing a “time to make art”, but rather by showing and reminding the children of the materials provided and allowing for exploration.

Haley-Banez and Walden (1999) go into more detail about this beginning phase, or what they call the Security Stage, which I would like to pay special attention to in my proposed curriculum. In this first stage, participants are typically struggling with ambiguity and anxiety about the new group. For this reason, it is important for the facilitator to directly address these issues and to bring in a discussion about security and trust. It is the task of the facilitator to create a safe and secure environment so that the group members can form connections and experience an awareness of others’ worldviews (Haley-Banez & Walden, 1999). Corey et al. (2018) also explain that in the early stage of a group, members do not yet know each other well enough for a true sense of community to be formed. In my curriculum, I provide intentional opportunities for the group members to get to know each other and work together, in order for a sense of togetherness and group cohesion to take place. Cohesion is a vital aspect of a group’s stability from beginning to end, and members need commit to actively participating and establishing a safe and accepting environment for there to be a safe environment (Corey et al., 2018). I consider it extremely important to develop security in a group of children, and I propose to accomplish

this by not only having discussions about safety, openness and trust, but also by incorporating an opening ritual music/movement circle as well as a closing ritual circle.

### ***Developmental Considerations***

In Broderick and Blewitt's *The life span: Human development for helping professionals* (2010), the authors go into detail about the physical, moral and social developmental changes that occur during the middle childhood years. These developmental realms have guided the goals and activities of my curriculum.

**Cognitive Development.** In middle childhood, a form of egocentrism emerges in which children fail to recognize their own subjectivity. In other words, they have a hard time taking another's perspective, and in turn fail to see things realistically. While some interactions (conformity, sharing, and expressions of empathy) may appear self-driven, these behaviors are not yet truly altruistic, but rather they serve the purpose of gaining acceptance or building popularity. Elementary-aged children have difficulty distinguishing between their own assumptions or beliefs and objective facts (Broderick & Blewitt, 2010). For this reason, I have embedded perspective-taking into my curriculum to not only include a discussion around recognizing different perspectives, but also to provide a visual art experience for the children to explore that not everyone sees the world as they do.

Young children struggle to behave contingently in a collaborative setting because they either fail to accurately evaluate the needs of others, or they fail to properly adjust their own behaviors to those needs (Broderick & Blewitt, 2010). This is something that not only teachers and parents, but also mental health professionals can help with. As Broderick and Blewitt acknowledge, "children's learning can be enhanced by cooperative learning activities when they are carefully planned and scaffolded by adults" (Broderick & Blewitt, p. 197, 2010). By offering

an expressive arts therapy group within a school setting, the therapist can work closely with teachers and parents to provide the appropriate support to help develop skills that allow children to flourish in social situations.

**Social Development.** Children's social cognition becomes more sophisticated in the elementary years and expands in such a way that they begin thinking about other people and social relationships. Children begin processing social interactions from birth, but as they grow older, they begin to realize that others have different beliefs and thoughts from their own. With school-aged children, social cognitive research typically looks at the quality of the child's understanding of the nature of other people's feelings, thoughts and desires (Broderick & Blewitt, 2010).

During middle childhood, friendship making is extremely important. Broderick and Blewitt (2010) reported that having a close friend can actually serve as a protective factor for those facing environmental risks. Counselors often have to deal with the consequences of poor peer relationships, and how inadequate conflict resolution skills can have a negative impact on emotional well-being, behavior, and academic achievement. Social relationships are essential for a child to gain experience in perspective taking by learning about others' points of view. Perspective taking lies at the heart of self-knowledge and self-recognition. Ultimately, this level of awareness marks the cognitive ability to engage in mutual relationships and solve problems in a way that considers the interests and needs of everyone. Social relationships are also necessary in supporting a child's sense of connectedness and security while fostering the development of their self-concept. All of these outcomes are intertwined and are the result of healthy and positive social interactions (Broderick & Blewitt, 2010).

Children aged about 5 to 9 are starting to understand that others have different viewpoints, but they are typically unable to maintain their own perspective and that of someone else at the same time. However, during this period children do become better at inferring the feelings and thoughts of others, especially when encouraged to reflect on them (Broderick & Blewitt, 2010). This is something that I encourage in my curriculum.

As Broderick and Blewitt (2010) discussed, effective clinicians must appreciate what can be reasonably expected from children at different stages of development. For example, teaching appropriate social skills such as communicating effectively and making eye contact may be irrelevant for a child whose level of friendship understanding is very egocentric or is not particularly interested in being friendly toward a specific person (Broderick & Blewitt, 2010).

### **Social Skills and Social Competence**

Huber, Plötner, and Schmitz (2017) reported that one major developmental task in childhood is the acquisition of social competence. While definitions for social competence vary, most have in common the shared view of the ability to fulfill personal needs/goals while also maintaining positive relationships in social situations. In middle childhood specifically, impaired social competences are linked to childhood psychopathology, such as internalizing and externalizing disorders. Internalizing problems include depression, anxiety, withdrawal, and somatic symptoms, while externalizing problems include aggression and acting-out or rule-violating behaviors (Huber, Plötner, & Schmitz, 2017). Working on social skills to make friends during middle childhood is crucial because positive peer relationships can serve as a protective factor against the development of externalizing and internalizing problems (Deković, Buist, & Reitz, 2004; Lansford et al., 2003).

Since friendships help children become more socially competent, cope with stress, and achieve well academically, researchers Tillman and Prazak (2018) developed and implemented a 12-week group school counseling intervention called the “Friendship Club” that focused on social skills training for elementary-age children. The Friendship Club curriculum was developed to help foster collaborative skills, and to encourage emotional and interpersonal growth among students who were neglected or rejected by their peers. After 12 sessions of implementing the Friendship Club curriculum, the students reported a notable improvement in their interpersonal relationships, and their ability to initiate, maintain, and heal relationships improved. Parents also reported quantitative and qualitative improvement in their children’s emotional satisfaction and social functioning (Tillman & Prazak, 2018). It is my aim to foster similar social and emotional growth with the development of my own curriculum.

### **Rainbowdance**

The opening and closing Rainbowdance rituals will help the children know what to expect, creating familiarity at the start and end of every session. Rainbowdance creator Dicki Johnson Macy (2018) discussed that repetition provides the opportunity for the children to learn and master the movements and words in the rituals which will improve self-esteem. Repetition is also one of the aspects that makes Rainbowdance a trauma-informed approach to dance/movement therapy. Every session in my curriculum begins with a Rainbowdance warm up activity. While sitting on a parachute that acts as a visual container, the children will warm up their bodies and their voices, while welcoming each other into the space. Then after the main activities, the group will come to an end on the parachute again, as the children calm their bodies with a lullaby. They will practice using gentle hands to tuck in a beanie baby animal, saying

goodnight to the stuffed animal and goodbye to their friends until next time (Johnson Macy, 2018).

By using simple songs and gestures, the children are able to easily master movements, boosting both individual and collective self-esteem (Johnson, 2007). Macy et al. (2003) expanded on this concept, explaining that when children are offered easily-mastered tasks within a consistent, predictable framework that uses music, movement and creative activities, they feel a sense of empowerment. When they master these tasks in the company of peers, it reduces their sense of isolation and encourages a newly found sense of group empowerment and self-esteem (Macy et. al, 2003).

Keeping in mind that the circle is symbolic of the integration of emotion, cognition, spirit, and physicality in the healing process (Johnson, 2007), I chose to begin and end each therapy session with a Rainbowdance circle ritual. The physical circle provided by the parachute ensures that everyone is equal and included and provides a container to hold the group members during the process. Moving in a circular pattern is calming and grounding and allows the individuals to experience the boundaries of safety and inclusion, as the inside and outside are visually defined. Each movement is repeated in patterns of 4 because repetitions provide dependability (Johnson, 2007). The opening sequence uses repetitive music and rhythm, which creates a ritual that becomes predictable. The rituals dependably return each session which encourages the development of trust (Macy et. al, 2003).

The basic formula for the opening circle ritual is also integrated with mirroring elements that enhance the connections between the self and social as well as the physical and spiritual environment. As Johnson Macy explains, “The positive experience of moving together, rhythmically lulled by familiar music, contributes to the developing resource base from which

children seek responses to social or emotional conflict... The trusting peer group develops the competency needed to venture out into the world as explorers and as friends” (Johnson, p.56, 2007). As the movements and voice are integrated, attunement may be achieved. This contributes to the understanding of nonverbal cues and the appropriate responses to those cues, which is developmentally important in terms of safety seeking (Johnson, 2007).

Dicki Johnson Macy reflects on her experience while participating in a Rainbowdance opening circle ritual: “Voices and arms rising and falling, rhythmically, like the sun. Each moment of connection seems full of wonder and pride for the children: Rites of passage; tradition making; community building” (Johnson, p. 49, 2007). Having been trained by Johnson Macy myself and also having facilitated a toddler Rainbowdance session at an early intervention program, I have personally experienced the community building that moments of connection that are felt during the opening and closing circle rituals. Johnson Macy goes into detail about her formula in creating the opening circle ritual:

While in circle, participants should feel as if they are simultaneously rocking and, being rocked in, a huge cradle. Attunement: that blissful rhythmic moment when all are moved by and moving to the same tempo; when action and reaction are evolving and dissolving, opening and closing, rising and falling, with out memory or anticipation. The experience of safety can only be assured in the “present moment.” Breath flows in a circle from within to without, the continuum of dynamic reception to expression. The formula that wraps around this huge cradle of containment has a nice ring to it. It qualifies components necessary for attunement in movement/song circles (Johnson, p. 50, 2007).

To conclude each therapy session, I am proposing that we take out the parachute once again and end in a ritual circle lullaby where the children will symbolically care for baby stuffed

animals, modeling the care that they have received or aspire to receive. This final segment promotes the reciprocity of giving and receiving and encourages the growth of a self-nurturing and empowered child (Johnson, 2007). Forming another circle before saying goodbye allows for one last collective moment to create a sense of safety and stability.

Including Rainbowdance into my expressive arts therapy curriculum will add a trauma-informed approach to the beginning and ending of each session, promoting a sense of safety and community. Since the circle rituals are repeated each week, the group members will know what to expect, while building confidence in the movements. Rainbowdance creates a true sense of togetherness and will give the group members the opportunity to self-reflect, and also to connect with each other through movement and song.

### **Discussion**

While I have designed this curriculum for a specific age and population, the activities and structure could be adapted for various populations including younger children, older children, and children with a history of trauma. Ultimately, the circle rituals at the beginning and end of each session are integral in providing a sense of safety and a sense of self- and community-reflection, and they can be used with any population. With the Rainbowdance sequence intact and consistent, the weekly expressive arts activities and goals could then be tweaked to be appropriate for the age or population of group members.

For younger children, goals may include more emphasis on sensory exposure and exploration, while also teaching and encouraging the children how to simply *be* with others. By offering a variety of art materials and modalities, young children can explore and express themselves in different ways. This is important because the arts can be an outlet for children to communicate thoughts and feelings that they may not have the words for. Also, young children

do not yet have the capacity for complex social skills such as taking another's perspective or empathy. It would be more developmentally appropriate to work on simple, functional social skills, such as listening, asking for help, and playing cooperatively with others.

Older children could also benefit from the structure and multi-modal aspects of my curriculum. Children in late childhood/early adolescence are developing their sense of self (Broderick & Blewitt, 2010), so perhaps the individual processes could be further emphasized and explored. Older children still benefit from using the creative arts as a way to communicate and express themselves, but they also may benefit from more verbal discussions and group processing as a means to provide peer support. The expressive arts activities could be made more sophisticated, such as incorporating collage-making or written word and poetry. The goals for this age could include the multi-modal exploration of the self, while also providing the children with a community from which they can receive support and feel as if they are not alone.

Finally, if using this curriculum specifically for populations with trauma histories, Rainbowdance would be a crucial intervention to build a sense of trust, safety and community. Rainbowdance is a trauma-informed program and implements movements in such a way as to calm the body (Johnson Macy, 2018). Throughout the beginning circle ritual, group members start lying down before moving into a seated position and then standing position. This progression is intentional, starting with the least threatening body position before moving upward to more vulnerable positions. Rainbowdance purposefully encourages self- and group-connectiveness, while also allowing for the body and mind to rest from any trauma. Offering Rainbowdance and the expressive arts can help this population create a narrative of the trauma, which will ultimately aid in their internal processing. In addition to Rainbowdance, when working with individuals with trauma, the facilitator must be mindful of the art materials that

they are providing. Some materials that are harder to control (i.e. watercolor), or that are more sensory-based (i.e. clay, finger paint), can be triggering for people with trauma histories. It may be beneficial for the group to create a “safe word” in case a child feels overwhelmed and is needing a break or additional support from the facilitator. Additional training in trauma-informed care may also be necessary to keep the group members safe and ensure that they are all receiving the individualized care that they need.

I would have loved to have had the opportunity to implement my curriculum, but unfortunately, I was unable to due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. However, I plan to carry out this curriculum in the future as I gain more experience working with children in the mental health field, and after COVID restrictions have been lifted. I welcome any reader of this thesis to use this curriculum in their own work. I trust that this curriculum could be beneficial in using the arts as a form of self- and group-expression and creating a sense of safety, all while helping to develop crucial social skills.

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## Appendix



# Week 1 – Introductions

*Welcome!*

**Group:** Social skills for friendship making and relationship building

**Ages:** 6-7 (1st & 2nd graders)

## Purpose

Group members will introduce themselves and get acquainted with one another, with the facilitator, with the space, and with the invitation to create. Group members will learn the opening and closing Rainbowdance circle rituals that will begin and close every session to create familiarity and safety while increasing self-esteem. They will also get to know each other by creating connections of common interests, and will explore sensory art materials in a lighthearted, fun environment.

## Objectives

1. Introduce the opening circle ritual
2. Learn group members' names
3. Create connections
4. Establish a safe and open environment by exploring different sensory materials
5. Introduce the closing circle ritual

## Materials Needed

1. Parachute, scarves and beanie babies (needed every session for opening and closing circles)

2. Colored puffy paint (shaving cream mixed with Elmer's glue and acrylic paint)
3. Collage supplies with different textured materials, papers, tissue papers, stickers, feathers, fabrics etc.
4. Glue sticks
5. Paper

## Expressive Arts Activity

*Welcome!*

The group will start off with a welcoming name activity in which group members are standing in a circle. The facilitator will go first, asking the members to tell the others their preferred name, saying it any way they would like. The other group members will all respond, repeating the name back just as the member had said it. This not only helps the children learn each other's names, but the mirroring creates a sense of connection. After everyone has had a turn introducing themselves, the facilitator will start again, asking each member to go around and do a movement to express how they are feeling right now in this moment (facilitator should emphasize that it can be any type of movement, big or small, with any body part, and should go first to lead by example).

After each member has shared their name and a movement, the facilitator will bring out the parachute to begin the opening circle that will start the group moving forward. This Rainbowdance opening circle enhances self-regulation, self-esteem, and social empathy while allowing the children to warm up their bodies and their voices together, and to welcome each other into the space.

Next, the facilitator will clean up the parachute while keeping everyone standing in a circle. The children will play a few rounds of the game "Me Too," where one by one they say something that they like, while others run in the middle yelling me too! This will help to break the ice, knowing that other members like the same things that you do. These connections will continue to grow throughout sessions.

With the time remaining, the facilitator will reveal two pre-set stations (one with the puffy paint and one with the collage materials), instructing that the children are free and welcome to just create! Playing some fun music in the background, this will give the opportunity for the members to explore with sensory materials, create without worrying about products (as emphasized by the facilitator), and open up to the idea about making art with other people. To close, the facilitator will bring back out the parachute, as they learn the closing lullaby circle that will end each session moving forward, using gentle hands to tuck in their baby animals before saying goodbye.



# Week 2 – Community Building

## *Rock Sculpture*

**Group:** Social skills for friendship making and relationship building

**Ages:** 6-7 (1st & 2nd graders)

### Purpose

Group members will create their own rock sculpture individually, and then will make one collectively. Group members will become more comfortable creating together.

### Objectives

1. Build comfort of exploring creatively
2. Create a rock sculpture independently
3. Create a group rock sculpture by working together, taking turns
4. Discuss how it felt to bring a selected few rocks to join the others in one creation as a whole

### Materials Needed

1. Parachute, scarves and beanie babies (needed every session for opening and closing circles)
2. A bag full of collected rocks (all different shapes and colors)

### Expressive Arts Activity

#### *Rock Sculpture*

The facilitator will start by dumping out a bag of rocks of all colors and shapes. They will instruct the members to come up and grab 6 rocks that catch their eye. Then, they will find a private spot in the room and create their own little rock sculpture. They are starting with something individual since this is the first session after introductions. Once everyone is finished, they will all slowly walk around the room to look at each other's sculptures (with the facilitator reminding to not touch anyone else's).

Once they have seen each other's creations, the facilitator will instruct them to choose three of their rocks that they would like to bring back to the group. Sitting in the circle, the facilitator will start by placing one of their rocks down in the middle of the circle, instructing the children to each come up and do the same one by one. Eventually, a group rock sculpture will be carefully created together.

The facilitator will bring to discussion how everyone thought about the experience of making their own sculpture, and then what it was like to make one together. How did you choose which of your rocks to bring back to the group? Sharing may conclude with the fact that it is nice to create things by ourselves, and it is also fun to create together.



# Week 3 – Community Building

## *Percussion and Painting*

**Group:** Social skills for friendship making and relationship building

**Ages:** 6-7 (1st & 2nd graders)

### Purpose

Group members will explore musical instruments with each other, as well as finger paint. They will continue to build connections, open up creatively, and get more comfortable with each other in this environment.

### Objectives

1. Build community and connection through playing music
2. Attune as a group
3. Connect through finger painting and work together

### Materials Needed

1. Parachute, scarves and beanie babies (needed every session for opening and closing circles)
2. Variety of percussive instruments (drums, tambourine, shaker eggs, wooden sticks, bells, etc.)
3. Fingerpaint
4. Small canvas paper
5. Large roll of paper

### Expressive Arts Activity

#### *Percussion and Painting*

Continuing to help group members feel comfortable, open up, and make connections, this week's activity will include two different creative expressions that will be done together as a whole. First, the facilitator will take out a bin full of different percussion instruments, including some small drums, instructing the members to each pick one out. They will be playful, trying different rhythms, jamming without worry of the sound. Then once the children have released their energy on the instruments, the facilitator will start a steady beat, inviting the other members to join in whenever they want, and however they want. This will continue until the facilitator feels as though there is a good closing point.

After one more final shake of the instruments, they will be put away and a big roll of paper will be put on the floor. The facilitator will pour out little bowls of washable finger paint and scatter them around the paper. They will instruct the members to explore the paint, how it feels, and just create (the facilitator may have to reiterate that we are painting side by side and with each other, but we also have to be mindful of our friend's personal space). The goal of this activity is to break through any remaining feelings of resistance surrounding creativity or openness.



# Week 4 – Community Building

## *“WEgo” Books*

**Group:** Social skills for friendship making and relationship building

**Ages:** 6-7 (1st & 2nd graders)

## Purpose

Group members will reflect on their positive traits, and what they have to offer to the group. They will artistically express their important qualities not only in this group, but in other groups in different settings. A spin off of “ego” books, this activity is meant to build self-esteem not just by reflecting upon what positive traits the group members have, but how those positive traits can help and contribute to the group as a whole.

## Objectives

1. Identify positive traits in yourself
2. Recognize what you offer/give to your community
3. Discuss how every group member plays an important role in the group, building connections and increasing self-esteem

## Materials Needed

1. Parachute, scarves and beanie babies (needed every session for opening and closing circles)
2. Markers, crayons, colored pencils, oil pastels
3. Pre-made paper booklet, stapled together with 4 pages

## Expressive Arts Activity

### *“WEgo” Books*

The facilitator will hand out pre-constructed paper booklets and will display a variety of coloring materials. The facilitator will instruct the members to think of positive things about themselves, and how these things can help contribute to our group (Given the age of this population, the facilitator might want to give an example, such as ‘I like to tell jokes, so I tell them at school to make my classmates happy). This can be expressed in drawings, words, or a combination in the booklet.

Following the creation of the booklets, a large group discussion will process the members’ reflections. The facilitator will go around and ask each member to share at least one thing they drew in their book that represents what they can give to the group (or another group,

such as their family or school). This group population is one that likely does not have many friends, so the facilitator must be extremely directive and supportive to help the children see that they really are important, and others see them that way. Then, emphasis will be placed on the fact that all of these positive traits are also wonderful to have with friends.



# Week 5 – Sharing

## *The Rainbow Fish*

**Group:** Social skills for friendship making and relationship building

**Ages:** 6-7 (1st & 2nd graders)

### Purpose

Facilitator will read *The Rainbow Fish*, a story about a fish who finds friendship and happiness after learning to share. Group members will create their own “rainbow fish” together out of colorful dancing scarves. They will then play a lily pad freeze dance game to provide opportunities to share.

### Objectives

1. Continue to get to know one another
2. Learn that sharing is kind, and kindness builds friendships
3. Make a creation together as a group
4. Practice sharing through a fun movement game

### Materials Needed

1. Parachute, scarves and beanie babies (needed every session for opening and closing circles)
2. The Rainbow Fish book
3. Basket of scarves of all colors
4. Pre-cut jumbo lily pads

### Expressive Arts Activity

#### *The Rainbow Fish*

The facilitator will read *The Rainbow Fish*, a children’s book about a fish who finds friendship and happiness after learning to share his beautiful scales. When the book is finished, the facilitator will open a dialogue about the moral of the story, and why it was nice of Rainbow Fish to share and how it led to friendship. Following the discussion, the facilitator will make an outline of a fish on the floor hand out a scarf to each group member. The children will come up one by one to put their colorful scarf (scale) down, and then the facilitator will put on a song and the members will “swim” around the Rainbow Fish together.

After cleaning up the scarves, the facilitator will then place large felt “lily pads” onto the floor, starting with one lily pad for each member. The facilitator will explain that they will be playing freeze dance, and when the music stops, the children will have to find a lily pad to put their foot on. After each round of freeze dance, the facilitator will take one lily pad away, so that members will have to start sharing them, until they all land on the same one in the last one. Another large group discussion about what it was like to share will follow, with emphasis on how being nice and sharing will help build friendships and relationships.



# Week 6 – Taking Turns

*Who's Got the Turtle?*

**Group:** Social skills for friendship making and relationship building

**Ages:** 6-7 (1st & 2nd graders)

## Purpose

Participants will gain experience taking turns through playing a fun group game. They will practice additional social skills such as eye contact, self-control and question-asking. Group members will gain a deeper understanding of the importance of taking turns with friends.

## Objectives

1. Summarize last week's learning of the importance of sharing
2. Discuss what taking turns means and why we take turns with our friends
3. Practice self-control by taking turns in a game
4. Improve language and communication skills
5. Promote social skills such as eye-contact, turn taking, and question-asking

## Materials Needed

1. Small stuffed turtle
2. Small blanket

## Expressive Arts Activity

*Who's Got the Turtle? (Idea modified from Lowenstein, 2011)*

Group members sit in a circle facing each other. One child will volunteer to go into the center of the circle and the facilitator covers her/him with a blanket (like a turtle shell). The facilitator will make sure when covering the child with the blanket to ask, "Are you okay under the blanket?" If the child is not okay, then the blanket will be removed, and the child will cover her/his eyes with no peeking. The facilitator will begin singing the words to "Who's Got the Turtle?" and pass the turtle to the next person as the group members join in singing.

### **"Who's Got the Turtle?"**

(sung to the tune of "Pop Goes the Weasel")

Round and round the turtle goes,

Pass it to your neighbor.

Where it stops nobody knows.

### Who's got the turtle?

The turtle continues to be passed around until the song is finished. The last person to have the turtle when the song ends, hides the turtle behind his/her back and then puts his/her hands in front like everyone else, pretending to look like everyone else. The facilitator will then take the blanket off of the child in the center. The child then goes around to each person, makes eye contact and asks them by name, "Lorie, do you have the turtle?" The person being asked must answer truthfully, "No, Timmy, I don't have the turtle." The child continues to ask around the circle until the turtle is found. The person who has the turtle must answer honestly, "Yes, I have the turtle" and brings the turtle out from behind his/her back. The person who was hiding the turtle now gets to be the person in the middle, covered under the turtle shell (blanket), and the game begins again. Each person will have a turn in the middle and will have a turn at hiding the turtle. The session will conclude with a large group discussion of the different social components just practiced (self-control, eye contact, taking turns).



# Week 7 – Different Perspectives

## *The World Through Your Eyes*

**Group:** Social skills for friendship making and relationship building

**Ages:** 6-7 (1st & 2nd graders)

### Purpose

Group members will become aware that different people have different perspectives, and they may not feel the same way that you do in a certain situation.

### Objectives

1. Awareness that different people have different perspectives through decorating a pair of paper glasses
2. Discuss the significance of recognizing different perspectives- not everyone sees things the same way that you do
3. Discuss why this is important for friendship building

### Materials Needed

1. Parachute, scarves and beanie babies (needed every session for opening and closing circles)
2. Pre-cut outline of a big pair of glasses out of cardstock (just frames, keeping the lenses blank and intact)
3. Markers, crayons, colored pencils, oil pastels
4. Stickers, feathers, gems, buttons, etc.

### Expressive Arts Activity

#### *The World Through Your Eyes*

As a warm up activity, the facilitator will pass out a piece of paper and a crayon to each member, instructing them to draw anything they want in just one minute. Afterward, the facilitator will ask a few members to share what they drew, drawing attention to the fact that no two pictures are exactly the same - just like two people may not always see things the same way.

After this brief discussion, the facilitator will pass jumbo glasses frames/ lenses to each member that were pre-traced and cut from cardstock. The children will have time to decorate their glasses however they would like, using the different materials provided. We plan to do a drawing warm up activity that makes this apparent, as the children realize that no one drew the

same picture as they did. We will then move into the main activity, where the children will color and decorate a pair of paper glasses. After the members are done decorating their glasses, the facilitator will go around asking everyone to share what they have made. Again, the facilitator will point out that no two glasses are the same (perhaps some decorated just the frames, or just the lenses, or on the inside versus the outside). A discussion will follow about how different people see the world differently, and not everyone will feel the same way that you do in a situation. Finally, the facilitator will mention how it is important to think about others' feelings, which is something that makes a good friend.



# Week 8 – Different Perspectives/ Empathy

## *Clay Apples*

**Group:** Social skills for friendship making and relationship building

**Ages:** 6-7 (1st & 2nd graders)

### Purpose

Group members will develop a deeper understanding of different emotions, with discussion that people may have different feelings in the same situation. Group members will be introduced to empathic thinking, a key factor in making friends.

### Objectives

1. Increase identification and expression of different feeling states
2. Improve skills for dealing with the expression of emotions in others and validating them
3. Reiterate understanding that people may react with different emotions in the same situation
4. Implement appropriate strategies for expressing emotions

### Materials Needed

1. Parachute, scarves and beanie babies (needed every session for opening and closing circles)
2. Five different colors of model magic clay
3. Five different animal puppets (ex. dog, cat, bird, bear, wolf)
4. Paper plates with a picture of the puppets on each
5. Crayons

### Expressive Arts Activity

*Clay Apples (Idea modified from Lowenstein, 2011)*

Facilitator will discuss the following basic emotions with the child: happy, sad, scared, angry, and surprised and give examples of each. Emphasis will be placed on the fact that other people also experience these emotions. The group members will be provided with buckets of five different colors of clay that will represent each emotion, and they will be asked to sculpt five clay apples with each color. Once each group member has finished sculpting their five apples,

they will each be provided five paper plates with animals on them.

The facilitator will then read a story in which the animal characters (the same ones on the plates) will display different emotions. The group members will be asked to pick a clay apple and put it on the correct plate each time a character in the story experiences a specific emotion. For example, a green apple when the bear is sad, if green was picked for sadness, or a red apple when the wolf is angry, if red was picked for anger.

The facilitator will tell any story in which the five emotions are displayed at least three times. It is important to take note that although the characters in the story will act out a specific emotion, such as anger or fear, the emotion is never labelled by the facilitator. The group members will therefore have the opportunity to label the different emotions through observing the verbal and non-verbal behavior of the puppets.

When the story is finished, the group members will discuss in pairs why he/she has picked the specific colored apple (why they chose that particular emotion). The facilitator will also make sure to bring to discussion any disparities in the colors/emotions that were chosen. Questions can then be asked on how the group members could respond to each character in the story, as well as what could be said to make them feel better, if applicable. If a child tells a specific character that his emotion is wrong, or that he should feel differently, the facilitator can discuss a more appropriate response and explain that emotions are never wrong, although they can be managed in a more positive way. Discussion will close with the reiteration that different people may feel differently about the same situation, and why this is important to recognize with friends.



# Week 9 – Empathy

*You Are My Mirror*

**Group:** Social skills for friendship making and relationship building

**Ages:** 6-7 (1st & 2nd graders)

## Purpose

Group members will have the opportunity to attune to one another, developing feelings of cooperation and empathy. Group members will be fully attentive, engaged, and sensitive to each other. A discussion will follow, processing why empathy is important, and why it is essential for close relationships and making friends.

## Objectives

1. Gain a deeper understanding of empathy through dyadic mirroring movements
2. Attune with a partner
3. Improve self-control
4. Discuss what empathy is and why it is important to have empathy for a friend

## Materials Needed

1. Parachute, scarves and beanie babies (needed every session for opening and closing circles)
2. More scarves

## Expressive Arts Activity

*You are my mirror*

The facilitator will split the group into pairs, denoting which of the members will be the “lead mover” first. The Facilitator should emphasize that the “witness” is just as important as the mover, and that roles will be switched so everyone will get a chance to be the leader. The facilitator will instruct the witnesses to stand a few feet away facing their leading partner. The witness will be their mirror, so try to copy every move the leader does, at the exact same time that they are doing it. It will be important for the facilitator to emphasize the importance of the leaders to move slowly, so the pair can move at the same time. This will bring the two into attunement.

The facilitator may decide to play music in the background. The group members have to be fully attentive, engaged, and sensitive to each other. It also motivates the individuals to be cooperative with each other. If the leader starts to move into difficult positions with her/his hands or body, then the practitioner may suggest, “Just keep it simple,” so the follower has an easier time to truly mirror the action. The practitioner may suggest that the leader just move the hands at first. Once both partners have had the chance to be the leader, they will have a short opportunity to discuss in pairs what that experience was like (the facilitator may want to add structure questions such as ‘what was it like to be the leader? The witness? Which did you like better?’). Then the facilitator will switch up the partners to repeat the activity, but this time the leader will be moving with a scarf (the witness will not have a scarf). Again, bring into short dyadic discussion about the experience. After both partners have led with a scarf, bring to a group discussion about what it was like to be “in sync” with another person, and how this brings forth connection and feelings of empathy. Reiterate that it is important to understand a friend’s emotions.



# Week 10 – Termination

## *Aloha “Goodbye” Leis*

**Group:** Social skills for friendship making and relationship building

**Ages:** 6-7 (1st & 2nd graders)

### Purpose

Group members will have the opportunity for expression and feelings around termination. They will reflect upon their group experience, create a keepsake to remember it by, and say goodbye to the other members and facilitator.

### Objectives

1. Increase open communication surrounding the ending of relationships
2. Provide a positive creative experience with closure and termination of the group
3. Create a keepsake lei
4. Reflections of favorite memories or important/ helpful aspects learned throughout the group and how to continue to use the skills moving forward

### Materials Needed

1. Parachute, scarves and beanie babies (needed every session for opening and closing circles)
2. Fabric flower petals (with pre-punched holes in center)
3. Plastic spacers
4. String

### Expressive Arts Activity

*Aloha “Goodbye” Leis (Idea modified from Lowenstein, 2011)*

The facilitator will begin by sharing with the group the symbolic meaning of the lei from the Hawaiian culture. According to HawaiiHistory.org (2008), a lei is given as a symbol of honor and affection. Great care is taken in making leis and they are given to family and friends as gifts of love and friendship. The lei is valued and worn with pride by individuals of all ages. There are many legends about the “luck” of the lei. It is believed that if a departing visitor tossed his/her lei into the ocean and it floated back to the beach, that visitor would one day return to the islands, keeping a promise of a future connection (Discover- Oahu.com).

In this activity, each member will make their own lei. They will create the lei by lacing flowers on the string and alternating their application with spacers. For every flower added, the facilitator will ask the members to share a personal reflection. Possibilities include a favorite group memory, a hope or wish for the future, a character quality valued in another member, something learned, or a reflection of how things are different now from when the group began. The facilitator can process with members throughout the activity by expanding on the members' reflections. Members can take the lei as a symbolic representation of affection or connection, or they can choose to "toss" it back, leaving it in the therapeutic environment.



***THESIS APPROVAL FORM***

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

**Student's Name:** Holly Olson

**Type of Project:** Thesis

**Title:** Group Curriculum Combining Expressive Arts Therapy & Rainbowdance: A Literature Review

**Date of Graduation:** 5/22/21

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

**Thesis Advisor:** E Kellogg, PhD