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Building Community:

A School-based Art Reflection Method for Newcomer Students During COVID-19

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

May 5, 2022

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Specialization: Art Therapy

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Abstract

Adolescent students who migrated during the COVID-19 pandemic are especially vulnerable to negative mental health outcomes. Research supports that school-based services provide protective resources to newcomer students that may be inaccessible outside of public-school settings. Expressive art therapies are some of the most successful interventions used with newcomer students, and the context of the pandemic offers a new opportunity to study the benefits of arts-based methods within their classrooms. For adolescents navigating cultural adjustment in the midst of a pandemic, trauma-informed research signals that community-building is a key strategy for protecting students from negative mental health symptoms. Art and craft theory gives intention to the materials and directives that art therapists can utilize in practice. With this research in mind, an art and writing method was conducted over three weeks in January 2022 at a public high school. Participants of the study included students ages 14-19, who migrated within the 2021-2022 school year. Languages spoken within the group included Spanish, Urdu, and Portuguese. This method was successful in revealing the relationship-building benefits of art and written reflection within this setting. Informed material choices, conducted by the art therapy intern, proved to be a beneficial aspect of its design. This method indicates the success of expressive art therapies with newcomers students, but leaves more to be researched within the fields of expressive therapies and education. Although public schools provide many important services for newcomers students, art therapy can be recognized as a valuable tool for facilitating cultural adjustment.

Keywords: Community; Relationship-Building; School-Based Services; Art Therapy; Expressive Art Therapies

Author Identity Statement: The author identifies as a straight-passing, queer, White woman of mixed European ancestry.

Introduction

Newcomer is a term used to describe people with “diverse migration experiences,” including refugees and immigrants (Santiago et al., 2021, p. 348). For adolescent newcomers who have migrated within the COVID-19 pandemic, these individuals are especially vulnerable to negative mental health outcomes because of the number of stressors they are experiencing, the instability that can result from a lack of support networks, as well as the barriers that limit access to resources. Newcomer children, and specifically adolescents, deserve in-school programming that addresses the unique developmental and social emotional needs of this population during a global pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has globally impacted adolescents’ mental health outcomes. Interventions targeting this population must be considered within the context of the event as it continues on into this day. Authors Listernick and Badawy found in their article that “overall rates of mental health disorders and symptoms among the pediatric population have increased,” with significant impacts (Listernick & Badawy, 2021, p. 544). They found that anxious and depressive symptoms have increased as well as the “worsening of underlying conditions” due to the pandemic (p. 544). Most notable was the “increase in patients screening positively for suicidality and suicide risk” within children (p. 545).

Knowing these impacts, a trauma-informed lens provides structure for adults working with children. According to the Trauma Learning Policy Initiative from Harvard University, “academic outcomes, social and emotional competencies and critical thinking skills are all enhanced when students have access to... environments where they feel safe and enjoy a sense

of belonging and connectedness” at school (TLPI, 2019). Not only do educators corroborate the use of trauma-informed lens in practice, and they identify that community-building is a way to do so (TLPI, 2022). This is an important goal because “when schools provide a welcoming and supportive community, students can be helped to overcome feelings of disconnection and can be supported to build skills that help them to be successful at school and in life” (TLPI, 2019).

Art therapy is described by the American Art Therapy Association’s (AATA) website. According to this organization, “art therapy is an integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches the lives of individuals, families, and communities through active art-making, creative process, applied psychological theory, and human experience,” within the therapeutic relationship (AATA, 2022). This practice can be used in personal and “relational” concerns as goals can support individuals and communities (AATA, 2022). Skills that can be improved are “cognitive and sensorimotor functions” as well as self-esteem, self-awareness, emotional resilience, insight social skills, and the ability to resolve conflicts for the purpose of “advanc[ing] societal and ecological change” within communities (AATA, 2022).

Merriam-Webster’s definition of community is “a unified body of individuals” that may further be defined by a shared experience, a common interest, or a social state (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Authors Coutts & Jokela wrote that “the term agency [can be] define[d] as the process whereby one individual or group of people acts as a conduit, facilitator, or enabler on behalf of others or themselves” (Coutts & Jokela, 2008, p. 91). Community art allows for “the empowerment [and] emancipation of a community through the agency of the community itself with art educational professions” to create “space for agency” (p. 91). Art can be used with adolescents who have recently migrated to the U.S to give voice to their experiences while also developing the community of the group as well.

Trauma-informed school services are pivotal to accommodating students' social emotional needs during the pandemic. Newcomers students who have recently migrated to the United States are particularly vulnerable to poor mental health outcomes, because of the pandemic, without the same social supports and resources available to other students. Art and written reflection can be used as mental health interventions with the benefits of creating and improving relationships through community practice.

Literature Review

Adolescence is a critical time developmentally in which people construct their emerging identities (Aponte, 2020). For adolescents developing within a global pandemic, identity development may not be supported within the systems they rely upon, such as school. Without the mitigating effects of adaptive coping strategies like art, music, and journaling, subconscious beliefs about the self can become interwoven into adolescents' emerging self-concepts (Aponte, 2020). For newcomers students relying upon school-based services, this time must be included within their school days. Despite research suggesting that newcomer students can benefit from creative arts therapies in their school days, little qualitative evidence exists to document this sort of programming in action (Aponte, 2021). To situate the need for a school-based art and reflection method within a newcomers classroom, the context of the pandemic, the support needs of newcomers, as well as the material philosophy to be used with this method are included.

Shared Trauma: The Collective Experience of Pandemic Life

Social worker and trauma researcher Charles R. Figley (2021) shared his perspective on the intersections between the COVID-19 and social trauma in his paper. Although his perspective centered the immediate effects of March of 2020, this literature validates the experiences of many as communities continue to process the pandemic's systemic effects today.

Figley identified that "disruptions to social networks," like school communities, not only changed the circumstances of day-to-day life but took away protective factors for people already processing this global event (p. 3). Not only were individuals vulnerable to the pandemic's effects, but the systems that operate to give people structure and community were compromised at a time when they were needed most (p. 3).

Figley names that we are experiencing "shared cumulative trauma, collective trauma, and systemic trauma" as we continue to live in a world influenced by a global pandemic (p. 3). Although the author is an American and this identity certainly informs his worldview, the scale of the COVID pandemic is entirely collective, operating on a global level. Figley's American perspective can be broadened to many people's experiences around the world and holds relevance in situating this method with newcomers students.

Global Perspectives on the Impact of Online Learning

As children around the world transitioned to online learning formats, leaving behind their classroom communities, many researchers took note of the implications of this event. Delhi-based researcher Sanya Aggarwal (2021) wrote an article about the mental health impacts of the pandemic, providing a non-Western perspective to a growing body of literature about the topic. In this study, she measured the pandemic's effects on Delhi public high school students' mental health experiences (p. 236). Aggarwal posited that without the structure and support of in-person high school, the participants felt increased levels of stress and anxiety because of the pandemic's consequences in their school communities.

Out of 80 students invited to participate, 61 people responded to a mailed questionnaire sent out by Aggarwal. These participants were between 15 to 19 years of age, and the data collected from their responses was analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis (p. 236). Results from the

data showed that students did face negative mental health outcomes due to the transition to online learning (p. 237). The most commonly reported emotions experienced by participants were "helplessness, frustration, anxiety, boredom and hopelessness" reflecting their dissatisfaction with the pandemic's effects on their learning (p. 238).

Differential Impacts in the United States

United States-based researchers D'Costa et al. (2021) studied the intersections between Latinx youth, ACE factors, and their pandemic experiences in their research. At the beginning of the pandemic, research showed differential impacts on the Latinx community at multiple levels (D'Costa et al., 2021, p. 335). For many students, the move to remote learning and other fundamental, systems-level changes were their first experiences with this level of stress. D'Costa et al. wrote that for others though, the pandemic may have been an additional serving of stress, uncertainty, and dysregulation (p. 336). The authors wondered whether the prevalence of adverse childhood events impacted the severity of pandemic-related stress on Latinx youth.

In response to this question, 142 students ages 13 to 18 years old participated in critical quantitative measures to better understand their pandemic-related stress, the number of ACES a person had experienced, and the resilience factors present in the individual (p. 339). These questions were presented in an online survey that was then analyzed using software coded for the research questions (p. 340). The results concluded that there was no significant difference between Latinx participants and non-Latinx participants nor any significance for level of pandemic exposure (p. 341). The study did find that the relationship between a child's number of adverse childhood experiences, resilience factors, and pandemic exposure are connected to levels of pandemic-related stress (p. 343).

With these results, D'Costa et al. urged schools to take this into consideration when supporting their students. In order to foster the resiliency factors that mitigate pandemic stress and the impact of adverse childhood experiences, schools should prioritize “relationship building...teaching of coping skills, and facilitation of consistency and structure” for students especially vulnerable to feeling the effects of the pandemic more acutely (p. 344). For those who are also coping with significant cultural adjustments during their adolescent years, access to social emotional services must be brought into the classroom (D'Costa et al., 2021).

Migration, Adjustment, and Newcomers' Experiences

Santiago et al.'s (n.d.) article discusses the pandemic's effects on newcomers and their families as well as advocating for the protection of school-based services for this population. Newcomer children are more likely to experience financial, physical, and emotional stress and trauma due to these experiences (Santiago et al., 2021). For students who have recently migrated to the United States during the pandemic, in addition to all of the other developmental challenges that occur at this age, feelings of helplessness and a lack of control may arise (Santiago et al., 2021).

Santiago et al. conducted qualitative interviews with newcomer students and parents to better understand the implications of the pandemic on their resettlement experiences (p. 349). The participants included 13 students, aged 11 to 18, and 14 parents (p. 349). Interviews were conducted verbally, using the family's preferred language, and these averaged to be 28 minutes in length for the parents and 12 minutes in length for the student interviews (p. 349). Qualitative analysis showed major themes in the participants' answers including challenges with adjustment; feelings of fear, worry, and uncertainty; financial burden; and lack of connection (p. 351).

When asked about the ways that the families are coping with these challenges, “many families emphasized the role school and their communities,” play in acting as support as well as the importance of recreational activities during this time (p. 354). The choice to implement this method within a school-based setting reflects the importance of adequate access to adolescent services and the significance of school-based social emotional care.

An Overview of School-Based Services

Panorama Education is a company that partners with school districts and independent schools to provide research-based literacy and social emotional support services for students (Panorama Education, 2022). In a 2021 resource guide they provided fifteen social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions to address “heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and learning loss,” due to the pandemic (Panorama Education, 2021). These interventions targeted relationship-building, self-awareness, community-support, and emotional-regulation strategies supported by research (Panorama Education, 2021). In addition to this handbook, the company has free and accessible resources on their website that connects teachers, administrators, and mental health clinicians to SEL supports to better address students’ needs from kindergarten to high school. While this resource is beneficial to school-based populations their general approach does not center the experiences and identities of newcomers’ students.

Authors Sullivan and Simonson (2016) published a systematic review of school-based services for refugee students to posture which methods are most effective with this population. To contextualize the need for this research, Sullivan and Simonson centered the importance of building resiliency and well-being in adolescents who have experienced trauma. While the trauma and migration histories of the newcomers students in this method are unknown, their status as newcomers students asks the researcher to operate under a trauma-informed perspective

with the knowledge that migration has the potential to create significant mental health needs (p. 503).

Although CBT and multimodal interventions were found to be successful, creative expression therapy was found to be the most commonly used intervention at the time of this review (Sullivan & Simonson, 2016). When trained art therapists led these interventions, versus untrained mental health professionals, the effectiveness of the therapy improved (p. 519). While this finding could prove to be a barrier in the execution of this method, the education and training of the researcher aids in the success of its implementation with these students.

Pandemic Relief: Use of Expressive Therapies in School

Authors Harpazi et al. (2020) wrote the article *Perceptions of art therapy in adolescent clients treated within the school system*. This study featured adolescents ages 14-18 and their experiences with school-based art therapy. Specifically, the authors studied the participants' initial conceptions, the setting of the school and the process of art therapy within it, the clients' relationships with the art therapist, as well as the overall impact of their experiences (Harpazi et al., 2020, p. 1). While some students reported that they were initially interested in art therapy as a way to avoid academic responsibilities, many noted the "personal and emotional process" that took place through this expression (p. 1). The participants reflected upon the advantages of having an art therapist in their school building. The space created through these interactions was considered as "an opportunity to relax" or a place of "shelter" within the building (p. 1). Additionally, the art therapist was perceived as a figure who contributed to the "whole school experience" as being an accepting presence and symbol or reflection of the school's care for its students (p. 1).

Much of the research identifying art therapy's efficacy with adolescents comes from a Western, and more specifically, United States perspective. Working with a diverse set of adolescents in the newcomers classroom, a broader scope of research is helpful for implementing culturally-aware praxis. Delhi-based researcher Aggarwal (2021b) published an article about the mental health impacts of art and music engagement during the pandemic. Coming from a social sciences perspective, she measured the frequency and usefulness of art and music as coping skills with public high school students in the early months of the pandemic.

Expressive Therapies and Reducing Stress and Anxiety

Quantitative data was acquired through the use of mailed questionnaires. The sample included 19 males and 12 females ranging from 14 to 19 years of age (p. 241). The results gathered from these surveys indicated that "51% of participants responded that they do not do anything to manage their stress" despite nearly "50% of participants encountering stress and anxiety continually" at the time of their response (p. 242). In terms of the utilization of art and/or music as coping skills, 61% of participants responded that they listen to music for stress relief and 28% noted art as providing this relief against anxiety and stress (p. 241). Ultimately, 80% of participants found either music or art to be an effective way to combat stress and anxiety at this time (p. 241).

The results of this study complement Western research which advocates for the use of art and music for the purposes of enhanced mood or lowered stress (Aggarwal, 2021, p. 240). Although none of the participants of this method are from India, this research perspective offers some information about how some non-Western adolescents utilize coping skills under stress. The nuances between regions and cultures around the world should not be ignored, however there is currently limited, existing research that examines the themes of art therapy, adolescents, the

COVID-19 pandemic, and mental health implications at this time. Because we are still living through the pandemic, and processing it in real time, future research is necessary.

Art-Making and Reflection: Bolstering Voice and Empowerment

In their article, authors Ramirez and Haen (2021) argued that academic research benefits from giving voice to the impact of creative experiences in diverse settings. (Ramirez & Haen, 2021). They contextualized their research by explaining that research that includes adolescents' reflections about art therapy, in their own words, is rare. Qualitative research can provide much needed information to a field that often perpetuates disparities in access and opportunity by centering white voices and their research adds to this gap in the literature.

Adolescents participating in a 12-week, school-based art experience were given voice to their experiences through art and written reflection (Ramirez & Haen, 2021). Operating out of an all-boys private high school in the Bronx, 78 participants aged 14 to 16 years old were selected from various academic placement levels within the school. After participating in twelve weekly group sessions for 40 minutes each, the boys were given folders including the summation of their artwork from the experience (p. 3). They were asked to select one piece “possess[ing] the most emotional content for them,” and use it to respond to five open-ended questions adapted from Anderson's (1997) model of art criticism in education (p. 3). The questions asked to the students included describing their work, describing how they felt before and after creating this piece, what about the chosen piece evokes emotions, and what the piece means to them in reflecting upon it (p. 3-4).

Art-Making and Reflection: Improved Sense of Self

The students' responses were coded and analyzed by the researchers to find that art therapy reinforced positive emotions for those who already held positive emotions within the school

environment as well as in the regulation and transformation of negative emotions from those struggling within the school environment (p. 6). This transformation of negative emotions was found to be caused by the ownership of an artwork as well as the ability to vent one's feelings during the process of creating it (p. 6). This study uses its participants' voices to provide the research data, and this method aims to rely upon the students' reflections in a similar way.

Because of the language barriers between students and the art therapy intern, written reflections made by the participants will allow for their experiences to be documented and amplified.

Written reflection after each session within the method also aims to provide opportunities for students to build upon their emerging creative identities. Authors Anderson and Haney (2020) wrote about the importance of self-concept in relation to creative ability in their article. Adolescent participants were assessed to measure the effect that self-beliefs, about one's creative abilities, impacts one's abilities to produce creative work or creative action. The researchers found that self-beliefs were closely related to the production of creative projects (Anderson & Haen, 2020, p. 622). The implication of this research suggested that allowing adolescents increased time to practice self-awareness and reflect upon one's creative potential may benefit students' self-belief as well as their perceived sense of creative support from being granted the time to do so.

Reflection Scaffolding for Increased Well-Being

Chu's (2021) article provides a framework to use within the content of the reflection questions. Chu, an undergraduate professor, implemented three PERMA strategies to foster well-being in his students (Chu, 2020, p. 1). PERMA stands for "positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment" which are thought of as comprising "well-being,"

in the field of positive psychology (p. 1). These tenets will be the basis of the reflection questions given to increase self-awareness and creative self-beliefs.

As Chu's undergraduate courses transitioned online, he implemented three strategies (Strengths Identification, Growth Mindset, and Gratitude) with his students (p. 1). Although the tenets of the PERMA model are applicable to this method, Chu's research methodology is not relevant to this method because of the developmental differences between each project's participants and their support needs. Implementing the tenets of engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment will be included in the method as gratitude and strengths-identification are used in the students' reflection questions following each week of the method's implementation.

Using Art Therapy Theory to Inform a School-Based Method

Using Hinz' (2020) book on the Expressive Therapies Continuum, materials can be selected based on clients' identities and therapeutic goals. The Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) and Material Dimensions Variables (MVD) theories of Lusebrink and Kagin (1978) aid in designing the art directives to use with the newcomers students as material choice can greatly tailor the impact of an intervention or experience (Hinz, 2020, p. 27).

The Material Dimensions Variables theory works alongside the ETC, suggesting that media can be thought of as either resistive or fluid (p. 27). Under this theory, resistive media require more sustained pressure, are "relatively easy to control" and encourage "deliberate mark-making" leading to cognitively-focused experiences (p. 27). Alternatively, fluid media "flow easily" and encourage experimentation and the creation of emotional responses (p. 27). Media such as pencil, crayon, and collage (resistive media), activates components on the left-side of the ETC (Kinesthetic, Perceptual, and Cognitive domains), and roughly corresponds to left-

hemisphere functions of the brain (p. 30). The right-side components of the ETC (Sensory, Affective, and Symbolic domains) can be accessed through fluid materials like paint, oil pastels, or water and may indicate right hemisphere predominance in information processing (p. 30).

Once a material is chosen, based on its ability to stimulate the desired domain, the material can be further adapted by the therapist with the client's needs in mind. Changing the limits of the material like its quantity or its method-of-use are ways that art therapists can adapt their chosen material(s) for the individual(s) using them in practice (p. 31). Changing the quantity of a material can safely contain levels of emotional exposure with materials that may be activating to clients. Augmenting the method that one is using a material can impose safe boundaries for clients too. Using a brush with paint offers more control of this fluid material rather than inviting the client to use their hands to manipulate the fluidity freely, for example. Providing mediators, or tools, to use with materials may offer more emotional space between the material and the client which can accommodate more room for engagement in reflecting upon the experience afterwards (Kagin & Lusebrink, 1978 as cited by Hinz, 2020, p. 31). Creating this safety for clients can complement a trauma-informed practice.

Naming the art therapy theories that inform the art development of this method, a social constructivist theory of materiality is also necessary. Moon's philosophy in the book *Material and Media* (2010) "recognized that the personal is embedded in larger social structures" and this reality dictates our work and perspectives as art therapists (Sullivan, 1990 as cited by Moon, 2010, p. 56). Material, under a social constructivist perspective, is seen as both having a unique set of physical qualities and a socially constructed meaning that represents larger systems that inform these views. Acknowledging this fact is necessary in the development of this method as clients and researcher engage in the same materials from their varying worldview perspectives.

Crafts' Potential in School-Based Art Therapy

Knowing the potential that material can have within a therapeutic relationship, and the art-making process, material can be deconstructed to include both fine art and craft methods. Kagin and Lusebrink's material theories can be expanded upon to include contemporary perspectives on craft and material. Leone offered additional commentary on Moon's social constructivist theoretical perspective in her book *Craft in art therapy*. Leone aimed to position craft as a "legitimate and foundational" category of material possibilities in spite of its implications in Western art spaces (Leone, 2021, p. 2). Because the division between art and craft has socially-constructed meaning implied within Western cultures, it is important to name that "high art" or fine art represents European standards that have been perpetuated by artists and art historians alike (p. 3). Rather than studying this divide as something of the past, naming that these attitudes still exist today in the field of art therapy is relevant.

For example, Leone named that the ETC does not include craft material or processes within the framework (p. 11). Continuing to perpetuate these divisions neglects the potential of craft in practice. Craft modalities provide benefits not possible with fine art materials; they can provide sensory and kinesthetic qualities that can be more accessible for people who do not see themselves as "artists" (p. 6). Crafts that require repetitive movement, like knitting or crocheting, can also provide therapeutic benefits as both mind and body engage in the process (p. 6). While crafts can be done individually, crafting in group settings can allow for increased community as socialization occurs while simultaneously engaging with the materials' sensory properties together (p. 6).

In this method, the inclusion of art and craft processes may offer increased opportunities for empowerment, agency, and social abilities as material support the intentions of the researcher.

Incorporating craft processes into this method aims to deconstruct problematic aspects of art therapy material theory in favor of honoring the unique potentials that craft can offer in this space. Elements of craft will be used to provide participants opportunities for community-building and self-affirming experiences that leave students feeling supported and empowered by the materials no matter their previous art-making experiences.

Method

I utilized a qualitative research approach to examine how the use of art and writing interventions support the community-building of a newcomers classroom in the time of the COVID 19 pandemic. Three one-hour sessions were used to introduce the method to the group. These sessions occurred once a week over three weeks in January 2022. Observations and field notes were used to document the participants' interactions with the method. I then used writing and art-making to reflect upon each session. An inductive analysis method was used to code the data for findings. I speculated that the analysis would find benefits of art and writing within the classroom setting and this population.

Participants

Participants of this study include the students, teacher, and instructional assistant of a newcomers English Language Learners (ELL) classroom within a public high school. Students of the school are ages 14-19. The students in the class have migrated to the United States within the 2021-2022 school year, but new students often join the class throughout the year. The ELL teacher previously welcomed an Expressive Art Therapy intern into his classroom for a multiple group sessions last year, and I have been conducting weekly sessions with the class since the beginning of this school year.

It is important to note that the number of students within these sessions often changes as new students join the class throughout the school year. Typical student absences, and COVID absences, also impacted the number of participants within the group week-to-week. These factors resulted in the number of participants varying throughout the method. The first week included nine students and two teachers. The second week included ten students and two teachers. The third week included eleven students and two teachers. The languages spoken by the students include Spanish, Portuguese, Urdu, and French.

Procedure

I conducted three, one-hour sessions with the class in January 2022. Each session took place within their classroom, and the time of day of these sessions varied depending on the school's rotating class schedule. Each session commenced with a warm-up and an overview of the schedule for the session. Slide presentations were used in each session to include translations of directives into the four native languages spoken within the room. I created a music playlist including instrumental songs from the students' countries of origin to play during each session. The class' teacher and his instructional assistant began the sessions standing around the periphery of the room to provide assistance and help distribute materials, but they engaged in the art making portion of the sessions alongside the students.

The participants completed written responses to reflections questions that I translated and printed out on paper. I instructed the students to complete the questions if they felt comfortable, to write in their native language, and that I would be reading their responses. All students completed the art directives without resistance. One student did not participate in the reflection questions, but the rest of students completed the questions and turned them in to be read. The teacher and aid did not participate in the written responses.

Session One: Marbled coffee filter sculptures

The first session took place in the wave of the COVID-19 omicron variant that hit the United States in the final weeks of 2021. This event greatly impacted the school's attendance as many students and teachers were absent in the first few weeks of school in January 2022.

- I presented a slide presentation to orient the group to the session.
- I prepared a mindfulness visualization to use as a warm-up for the session. The graphic did not load due to technical difficulties. Instead, the group listened to instrumental music without the visuals.
- I introduced the art experiential. The instructional aid assisted by passing out materials.
- Each participant received (1) plastic plate, (4) coffee filters, a paint brush, a piece of cardboard to use for drying their coffee filters, and their choice of washable markers.
- I demonstrated the three-step process and an example of a final product (see Figure 1)
 - I drew on a coffee filter with markers and then used a paintbrush to brush water onto the decorated coffee filters. The water step occurred inside of the provided plastic plate. Pre-dried, colored coffee filters were used to show the final folding process.
- The participants were invited to draw on their coffee filters.
- The instructional assistant poured water into (1) disposable cup for each student to use after drawing.
- The participants cleaned up their materials and lay their filters on the cardboard to dry.

The group voted to wait to fold their sculptures until the following session. I gave them a written reflection questionnaire to complete before the end of the class period.

Figure 1

Photograph of Demonstration Example Created for Participants



Session Two: Clay Animal Figures

- A slide presentation with language translations was used to give participants an overview of the session's schedule.
- Continuing last week's art experiential, clothes pins and paper folding were used with the marbled coffee filters to create 3D sculptures to be hung on the wall.
 - The intention of this activity was to introduce a sensorial craft technique to the group as well as offering participants ownership and expression of their classroom environment through a collaborative installation.
- The participants followed along with photographed steps on the board as I demonstrated the technique around the room for additional assistance.
- Participants who were absent the previous week, and had not made their own coffee filters, were given previously prepared filters in order to be able to participate.
- A string was assembled on the wall with help from the instructional assistant.
- Each person added their sculpture onto the wall display.

- An art activity using clay was introduced to the group once the sculptures were hung on the wall.
- The slide presentation asked participants to think about themselves as being represented by another animal. What would this animal be?
- The participants were given thirty minutes to create this animal out of clay. Referencing photos on the internet was allowed.
- Each participant received (1) plastic plate, (12) half-inch rounds of polymer clay in the colors of dark green, light green, dark blue, light blue, purple, pink, red, yellow, brown, black, and white.
- Once participants created their animals, they positioned their animals on a shared display at the front of the classroom. A variety of animals were created by the participants (see Figure 2).
- The participants were then given reflection questions to be answered and returned.

Figure 2

Photograph of Clay Animals Inspired by the Participants' Creations



Session Three: Collaborative Quilt-painting

- The structure of the third session followed the same format as the previous two sessions. A slide presentation was used to provide instructions and translations. A schedule of the session was outlined to the group first.
- The mindfulness visualization warm-up, from the first session, was attempted again. The video did not load on the school's Wi-Fi. The warm-up was cut short because of this technical difficulty.
- I led a short discussion about the idea of a quilt, or an image made up by smaller images with the group. Translations of the word and definition of "quilt" was provided through the slideshow.
- The collaborative quilt painting art experiential was introduced (see Figure 3).
- Each participant was given (1) cream-colored square of cardstock and a palette of acrylic paints in the colors of red, orange, yellow, green, light blue, dark blue, purple, black and white. Q-Tips were provided as painting utensils. The participants were invited to observe if this tool made the painting more difficult or less difficult for them.
 - The intention of controlling the material in this way was inspired by Kagin & Lusebrink (1978) in an attempt to provide support to the fluidity of the paint.
- The participants were given thirty minutes to complete their paintings. When they were finished, they set them on a table to dry and collected the reflection questionnaire for the week.

Figure 3

Photograph of Painted Quilt Squares Inspired by the Participants' Collaborative Painting.



Inductive Analysis

Each session was documented through notes that I took at the end of each session as well as my own art products from each art experiential. Following the method's completion, I wrote 20-minute stream-of-consciousness reflections about each session. Using my field notes and process writings, I coded them for repeated themes relating to my research question. Reflecting upon the most salient themes from the entirety of the study, I created one final art piece to represent the method's successes within this population.

Results

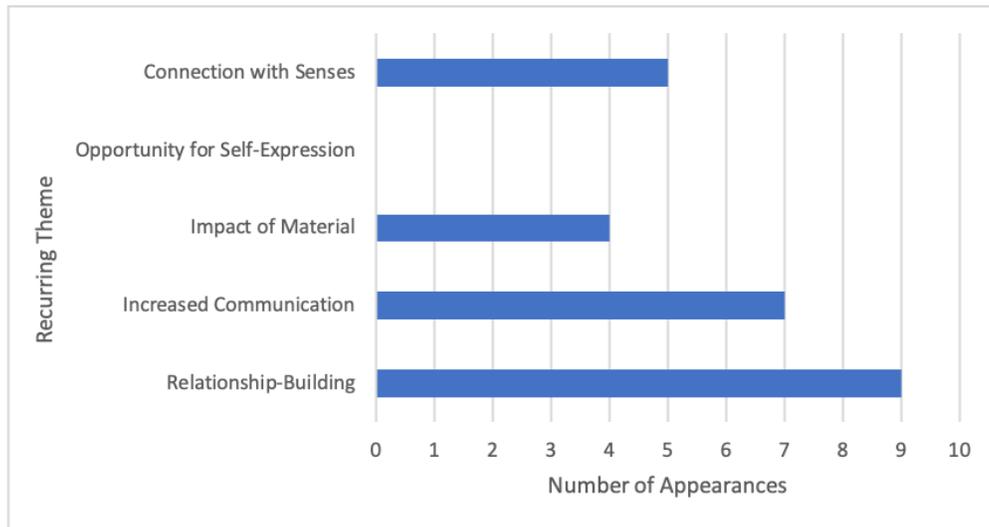
Session One

In my data from the first session, I found the themes of Relationship-Building and Increased Communication to appear most frequently (see Fig. 4). Within my art and writing, 36% of the information reflected success in Relationship-Building and 28% of the information reflected Increased Communication between group members. Through the marbled coffee filter experiential and written reflection method, these skills were observed by the researcher. The theme of Connection with Senses (20%) is also significant; it was found more frequently than the

Impact of Material (16%). There was no evidence of the theme of Opportunity for Self-Expression in this sample.

Figure 4

Session One Prevalent Themes

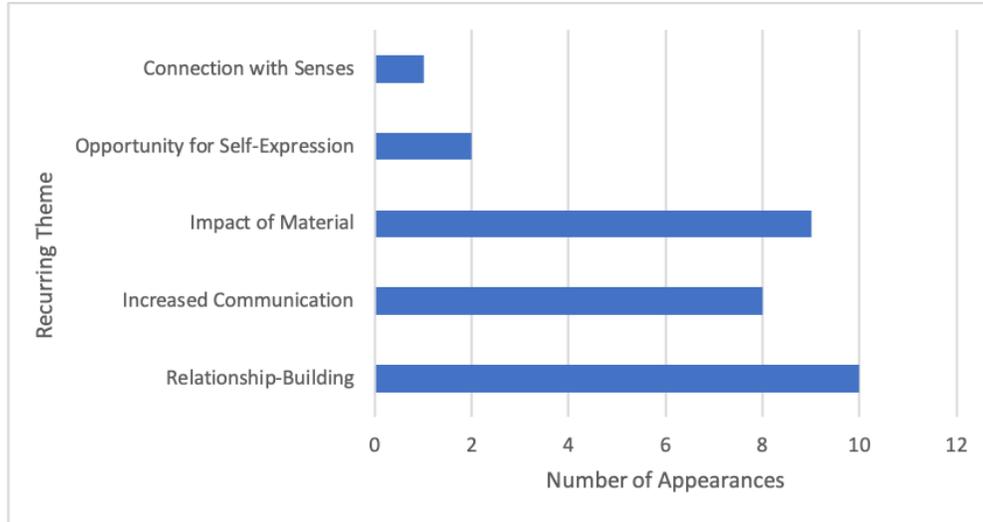


Session Two

Data from Session Two resulted in frequent themes of Relationship-Building, Impact of Material, and Increased Communication (see Fig. 5). Thirty-three percent of the data reflected Relationship-Building while a close 30% reflected the Impact of Material within the group. 27% of the data noted Increased Communication between group members while only 6.7% of the session notes documented the Opportunity for Self-Expression. Only 3.3% of the data documented impacts from Connection with Senses in the method.

Figure 5

Session Two Prevalent Themes

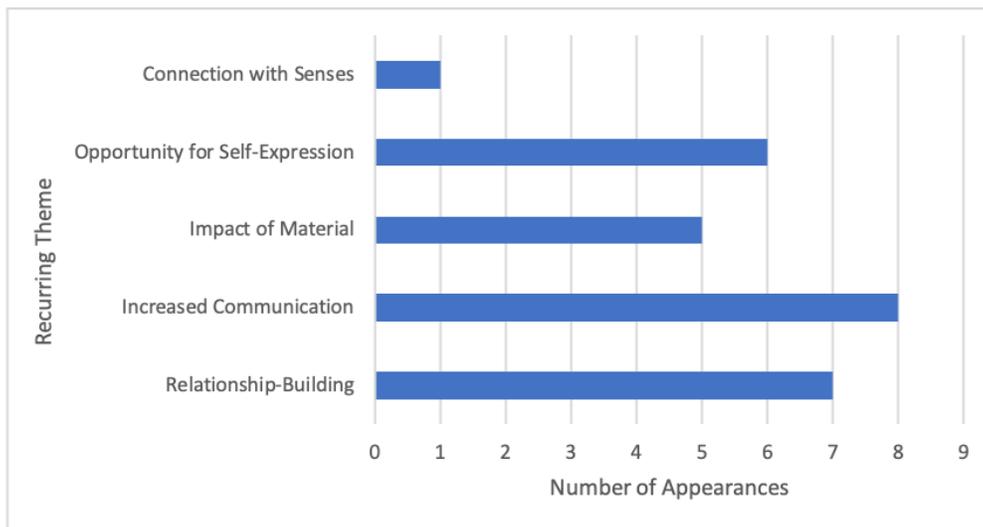


Session Three

In the data from Session Three, the themes were more equally distributed than the previous two sessions’ data (see Fig. 6). The strongest theme in this session includes Increased Communication (29.6%) followed by Relationship-Building (25.9%) , Opportunity for Self-Expression (22.2%), and Impact of Material (18.5%). The least frequent theme was Connection with Senses (3.7%).

Figure 6

Session Three Prevalent Themes



Total Method

As indicated in Table 1, the method yielded the most significant themes of Relationship-Building, Increased Communication, and Impact of Material during the sessions. I created an art piece to reflect upon these results (see Fig. 7). I used marbled coffee filters that were unused in Session One to explore how relationships developed, communication improved, and participants were able to experience the impact of material within the method.

Figure 7*Final Art Reflection*

Table 1

Most Prevalent Themes Across Method

Session/s	Prevalent Theme 1	Prevalent Theme 2	Prevalent Theme 3	Notable Material/ Media
Marble Coffee Filter Sculptures	Relationship-Building	Increased Communication	Connection with Senses	
Clay Animal Representations	Relationship-Building	Impact of Material	Increased Communication	
Collaborative Quilt Painting	Increased Communication	Relationship-Building	Opportunity for Self-Expression	
Total Method	Relationship-Building	Increased Communication	Impact of Material	

Discussion

I studied the social-emotional effects of an arts-based method with newcomer students at a public high school during the COVID-19 pandemic. I utilized research suggesting that the pandemic has created increased stress for many adolescents, but especially those who have simultaneously been exposed to diverse migration experiences (Figley, 2021; Santiago et al.,

n.d.). Because arts-based interventions have been successful with this population and setting, I created a method to include diverse material experiences as well as a reflective writing component to encourage self-awareness and communication between the participants and the researcher (Aponte, 2020; Anderson & Haney, 2021). Utilizing my art and writing in response to the students' engagement with this method, I found the experience to bolster Relationship-Building and Increased Communication between group members as well as evidence to support the Impact of Material within this setting.

The disruptions to social networks that occurred because of the pandemic, as well as these participants' newcomers experiences, provide a basis for community-building efforts within mental health interventions. Knowing the barriers to access within this population, schools have the unique opportunity to provide evidence-based supports to students adjusting in the midst of traumatic circumstances. This method offers a framework to show school administrators how arts-based methods can positively influence connections of community within school environments. Although non-expressive SEL interventions that prioritize relationship-building are being utilized in schools, expressive art therapy interventions led by trained professionals have been shown to be especially effective with newcomer students in particular (Sullivan & Simonson, 2016).

Providing art therapists with opportunities to work in schools allows for informed decision-making to appropriately address clients' needs in cultural adjustment interventions. Although this decision-making looks different depending on the situation, I utilized material theory in this study to define which materials and directives could best support the setting and population (Hinz, 2020; Leone, 2021; Moon, 2010). Materials such as water, marker, clay, and paint were used to provide diverse cognitive and sensorial experiences for the participants to

reflect upon in their writing. Tools were utilized to augment the fluidity of some materials to account for the range of previous experiences of the group as well as the different preferences and sensory-needs expected within any group. These choices informed the research. Where different material decisions or directive approaches could have distracted or distressed participants, this method allowed for the theme of Impact of Material to be salient for the participants and researcher alike.

As school communities continue to address the mental health implications of COVID-19, administrators and policy makers have the influence to provide quality art-therapy interventions for students. Especially for students who have experienced complex and traumatic life events, expressive SEL interventions are tools for healing within school communities. This research postures that with the expertise of trained expressive therapists, students can thrive once their social emotional needs are adequately addressed. Especially for vulnerable students, like those labeled “newcomers”, art therapists are valuable resources with the skills necessary to implement trauma-informed arts-based methods.

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

Thesis Advisor: *Dr. Rebecca Zarate*