



The Benefits of Visual Arts on Pediatric Populations



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PROJECT QUESTIONS

1. How might a diversity-based art class change the short term affect of children in an after school educational setting?
2. What is the role of visual arts in a pediatric therapy setting?

BACKGROUND

This semester, I volunteered at the Children's Developmental Institute at Providence Hospital to learn more about my future career in occupational therapy. This clinic provides services that help with children's developmental processes of gross motor, fine motor, social and speech skills. Therapists at the Children's Developmental Institute use art-based interventions to help strengthen these skills. In March of 2019, I began to volunteer at Expresiones. This is an after school program that enriches the Hispanic community by providing culturally diverse activities and instilling cultural pride for children in the Portland area. My role was to help tutor the participants. The goal of this research was to combine the art-based interventions that I had observed at the Children's Developmental Institute with the diversity-based education, which is the mission of Expresiones, to create an art program that is meaningful and informative for the students who attend Expresiones.

METHODS

METHOD 1: The Role of Art in Pediatric Therapy

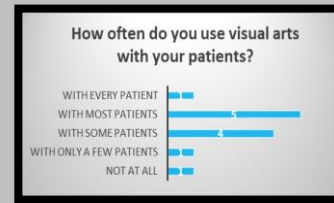
A survey was sent to speech, physical and occupational therapists at the Children's Developmental Institute at Providence Hospital. The survey contained 7 questions which address how often visual arts were used in therapy sessions, what skills therapists are attempting to strengthen with art-based activities, and what diagnoses can be most benefited from art-based interventions.

METHOD 2: A Diversity-Based Art Class

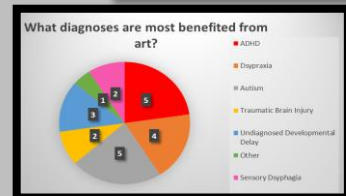
The diversity-based art class consisted of two classes with a focus on Hispanic folk art. The first topic was inspired by the fantastical and colorful style of Alebrije sculptures originating in Mexico. Worry dolls were discussed in the second art class. Originating in Guatemala, children traditionally tell their worries to these dolls to avoid nightmares. The subjects differed in each intervention, because the participants consisted of those were able and wanted to attend the art class. The ages of the children ranged in from 6-11 and the sample size was 6 in every intervention. The children's' moods were assessed before the art project and 45 minutes into the class via the Fast Assessment of Children's Emotions (FACE).

RESULTS

The Role of Art in Pediatric Therapy



"Visual arts-based activities increase cognitive understanding of the task, decrease dependence on language to participate, increases regulation by creating clear & simple expectations, improves regulation by providing choice & control, and the improves processing speed of transitions"
-Occupational Therapist

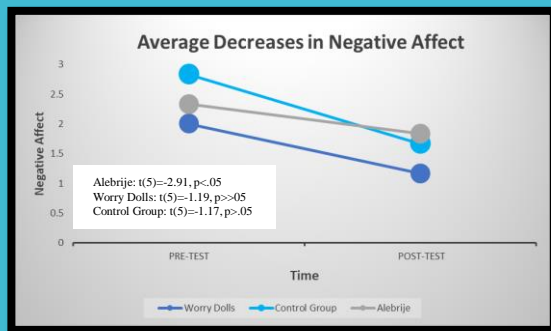


What skills are you attempting to strengthen with visual-arts?



"Arts-based interventions allow patients to explore another outlet for learning and language skills. Many children benefit from hands-on arts based activities as opposed to structured tasks"
-Speech Therapist

Diversity-Based Art Class



The participants in the Alebrije Art Class

DISCUSSION

Survey Results: The Role of Art in Pediatric Therapy

- The results of the survey demonstrated that the visual arts are an integral part of therapy at the Children's Developmental Institute.
- Of the 12 therapists surveyed, all but one said they used art in their therapy. The therapist that didn't use art reported that art activities weren't possible since they worked with an infant population.
- The top three skills that were reported to be most benefited by the arts were occupational skills, problem solving, and ability to produce work.
- ADHD, Dyspraxia, and Autism were the diagnoses that the therapists deemed to be the most benefited by an arts-based intervention.

Diversity Based Art Class

- There was a significant decrease in negative affect for the Alebrije themed art class. However, there was no significant change in the worry doll class nor the control.
- The difference in results could be explained by the emotional regulation strategies of venting (processing and explaining emotions) versus distraction (distracting oneself from emotions).
- Past research in pediatric populations has demonstrated that venting about emotions rather than distracting through drawing is less effective in improving a bad mood (Drake & Winner, 2013).
- The worry doll class took place a few days before the vast shutdown of businesses and schools due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The children were aware and expressed concern about the pandemic during the activity.
- Instead of distracting the children from the Coronavirus pandemic, the worry doll activity may have activated feelings of anxiety, causing mood to not improve significantly.
- Worry dolls have been used for generations in Guatemala to help children ease their anxieties. Although the worry dolls were not beneficial for reducing short-term negative affect, perhaps the children might use the worry dolls they made as a long-term coping mechanism during these unpredictable times.

CONCLUSION

Through this research, I have investigated the various benefits of visual arts for a pediatric population and applied this research to a community organization. In my future career as an occupational therapist, I plan to apply what I learned about visual art and implement it into my practice. Furthermore, I hope that the information Furthermore, I hope to add to the vast pool of psychological knowledge surrounding the benefits of art-based therapy, so that organizations such as Providence Children's Developmental Institute and Hacienda can have more evidence to support visual arts as an important therapeutic practice.

REFERENCES

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 Müllersdorf, M., & Ivarsson, A. B. (2012). Use of creative activities in occupational therapy practice in Sweden. *Occupational Therapy International*, 19(2), 127-134. doi:10.1002/oti.1327