

# HVSSSC

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FACT SHEET

No. 3 • June 2008

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### **Art Therapy: A Valuable Tool For A Supportive Learning Environment**

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Art therapy is a growing field that is still relatively unknown, however many of its theories and techniques have existed for centuries and across many cultures. Art therapy pairs the basic premises of psychology with the notion that creative practice optimizes health, wellness and cognition to support those psychological principles. Many of the basic tenets of art therapy can also be applied to enhancing supporting learning environments and project-based learning to best meet the needs of students with multiple learning styles. Utilizing these strategies can potentially improve school programs on many levels, while supporting the New York State Learning Standards. Art activities provide alternative tools for reaching and teaching students, and improving student connectedness in your school, classroom, or counseling program. By offering avenues for multi-disciplinary self-expression, students can improve self-esteem, problem solving and communication skills. The use of art can also help build skills such as impulse control, visual motor & conceptual skills, self-confidence, managing emotions and development of basic life skills. Allowing kids to be creative can help activate left-right brain connectedness and improve their abstract thinking skills. The use of meaningful art activities can enhance programming in and out of school and help to make learning fun.

#### **How can the use of meaningful art activity contribute to a supportive learning environment?**

Encouraging our students to express themselves sends the message that we care and that their voice matters. Research shows that students who feel cared for are more likely to succeed and feel connected to school. This alone is a simple example of how the integration of art contributes to a positive school climate. Incorporating social-emotional education into traditional curriculum can be challenging for many educators, however the use of art can simplify these efforts. When students have the opportunity to talk about their artwork and creative experience, their emotional vocabulary is enhanced and they are practicing appropriate self-expression. Using these skills to express themselves appropriately can then transfer to situations where they might otherwise act out. Student choice is also an important factor in the development of a supportive learning environment. Encouraging creative creativity contributes to a more student centered classroom where

youth have choices around how they will best demonstrate knowledge. Use of art in the classroom also can support differentiated instruction and teaching to the multiple intelligences.

#### **What is Art Therapy?**

The American Art Therapy Association, AATA, (see reference section for a description of this organization) defines Art Therapy as "an established mental health profession that uses the creative process of art making to improve and enhance the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages. It is based on the belief that the creative process involved in artistic self-expression helps people to resolve conflicts and problems, develop interpersonal skills, manage behavior, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and self-awareness, and achieve insight. Art therapy integrates the fields of human development, visual art (drawing, painting, sculpture, and other art forms), and the creative process with models of counseling and psychotherapy."

#### **How Did Art Therapy Begin?**

Examples of visual expression being used for healing can be found throughout history and as early as 1890. The use of art in psychiatric facilities, utilization of the Rorschach and other projective tests, personal memoirs of artists such as Leonardo Da Vinci and Vincent Van Gogh and even Freud's early theories of creativity are just a few of the earliest traces of art therapy. In the early 20th century, psychiatrists were increasingly interested in the artwork created by their patients with mental illness and educators were discovering that children's art expressions gave them significant clues about developmental, emotional, and cognitive growth. Soon after, hospitals, clinics, and rehabilitation centers began to include art therapy programs along with traditional "talk therapies," recognizing that the creative process enhanced recovery, health, and wellness. Finally, in 1940s art therapy became known as a distinct profession when Margaret Naumberg founder of "The Walden School" in NYC, began publishing her work using art therapy. As a result, the profession of art therapy grew into an effective and important mode of communication, assessment, and treatment with children and adults in a variety of settings. In 1961 Elinor Ulman published the first professional journal devoted to art therapy and in 1969 the American Art

Therapy Association was founded. Currently, the field of art therapy has gained attention in health-care facilities throughout the United States and within psychiatry, psychology, counseling, education, and the arts.

### **Who can benefit from Art Therapy?**

Art therapy is used with children, adolescents, adults, older adults, groups, and families to assess and treat anxiety, depression, and other mental and emotional problems and disorders; mental illness; substance abuse and other addictions; family and relationship issues; abuse and domestic violence; social and emotional difficulties related to disability and illness; trauma and loss; physical, cognitive, and neurological problems; psychosocial difficulties related to medical illness and to support personal growth. In short, everyone can benefit from art therapy!

### **Where Do Art Therapists Work?**

Art therapists work in a variety of settings, including, but not limited to:

- Hospitals and clinics, both medical and psychiatric
- Out-patient mental health agencies and day treatment facilities
- Residential treatment centers
- Halfway houses
- Domestic violence and homeless shelters
- Community agencies and non-profit settings
- Sheltered workshops
- Schools, colleges, and universities
- Correctional facilities
- Elder care facilities
- Art studios
- Private practice

An art therapist may work as part of a team that includes physicians, psychologists, nurses, mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, rehabilitation counselors, social workers, and teachers. Together, they determine and implement a client's therapeutic goals and objectives. Other art therapists work independently and maintain private practices with children, adolescents, adults, groups, and/or families.

### **Who is qualified to practice Art Therapy?**

An art therapist must have sensitivity, empathy, emotional stability, patience, interpersonal skills, insight into human behavior, and an understanding of art media. An art therapist must also be an attentive listener and a keen observer. Flexibility and a sense of humor are important in adapting to client needs and work setting. Art therapists are master's level professionals who hold a degree in art therapy or a closely related field. Educational requirements include: theories of art therapy, counseling, and psychotherapy; ethics and standards of practice; assessment and evaluation; individual, group, and family techniques; human and creative development; multicultural issues; research methods; and practicum experiences. Art therapists are skilled in the application of a variety of art modalities (ie: drawing, painting, sculpture, and other media) for assessment and treatment. In New York State, the practice of creative arts therapy and use of the titles "creative arts therapist" and "licensed creative arts therapist" requires licensure

as a Mental Health Practitioner with a specialty in creative arts therapy through the NYSED Office of the Professions. Creative Arts therapy includes but is not limited to those specialties of art, music, dance, drama, psychodrama, or poetry therapies.

### **How can I utilize elements of Art Therapy in my work?**

With a little bit of research, training and guidance you can begin to more fully understand and implement the basic principles of art therapy into your everyday life and work. In working with children, a great start is simply encouraging them to use art as another way to express themselves regularly. Often it can be difficult for youth to fully articulate their thoughts through verbal communication alone and art allows for a fun avenue to enhance mutual understanding. Promoting the use of art can also help build skills such as problem solving, impulse control, visual motor & conceptual skills, self-confidence, and managing emotions in addition to developing basic life skills. Allowing kids to be creative can help activate left-right brain connectedness and improve their abstract thinking skills. Of course only those fully trained and licensed are qualified to call themselves art therapists and to use art therapy in a clinical setting.

### **Research**

**Americans for the Arts, 2006-** This study shows that students with four years of high school arts classes have higher SAT score than students with one-half year or less, scores 1,083 vs. 980 respectively. Data from The College Board shows the art students scores to be 103 points better.

**Americans for the Arts, 2002-** The study, *Using Art Processes to Enhance Academic Self-Regulation*, states that "Artistically talented but academically at risk 4th, 5th and 6th grade urban students used more self-regulatory behaviors during classes in which the arts were integrated into the lesson. The **2002 South Carolina study-** *The Arts in the Basic Curriculum Project: Looking at the Past and Preparing for the Future*; reveals that schools that made room in their schedules for the arts at the expense of other academic disciplines *did not* suffer a decline in standardized test scores in the courses that lost time in the school schedule

**The 11/1/06 National Endowment for the Arts study-** *The Arts and Civic Engagement: Involved in Arts, Involved in Life*; reveals that people who participate in the arts also engage in positive civic and individual activities.

### **References and Resources**

#### **American Art Therapy Association:**

<http://www.arttherapy.org>

The American Art Therapy Association (AATA) is an organization of professionals dedicated to the belief that the creative process involved in art making is healing and life enhancing. Its mission is to serve its members and the general public by providing standards of professional competence, and developing and promoting knowledge in, and of, the field of art therapy. AATA is a national, non-profit association representing approximately 4500 members. It is governed by an 11-member Board elected by the membership and more than 30 AATA Regional Chapters conduct meetings and activities that promote art therapy on the local level.

**The Art Therapy Sourcebook** By, Cathy A. Malchiodi, 1998, Lowell House Publishing

**School Art Therapy:** [http://www.schoolarttherapy.com/school\\_art\\_therapy.htm](http://www.schoolarttherapy.com/school_art_therapy.htm)

**The National Endowment for the Arts:** <http://arts.endow.gov/>