

## THE USE OF EXPRESSIVE ARTS AS INTERVENTION FOR CHILDREN

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### **ABSTRACT**

Several scientific research have consistently proven that art has physical, cognitive, psychological, and social benefits for children and these benefits increased when art was applied in a therapeutic way (Cochran, 1996; Malchiodi, 1998; 2005; Schirmacher, 2006; Nadkarni & Leonard, 2007) which has resulted in the development and popularity of expressive art therapies by helping professions. The present study aims at analyzing the knowledge, utilization, and definition of art and art in therapy among the professionals involved with HIV infected children. A checklist of 52-item survey of Likert –Scale and Yes – No format questions designed by Nicole L. Brogdon , 2011 was used. The findings revealed that helping professional’s are generally knowledgeable about the benefits of arts for children. The findings also illustrate a significant lacking in education about art therapy and also lack of exposure to the practical applications of art therapy within their educational experiences.

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## INTRODUCTION

Art therapy is an intervention process that traditionally has drawn from psychoanalytic theory for its framework and procedures. Modern art therapists utilize a procedure of creative art therapy that is suitable to the psychosocial characteristics and psychological requirements of their clients. As practical specifically to traumatized children, art therapy repeatedly (but not exclusively) comprises the development of a therapist–client relationship through the creation of art, often coupled with storytelling (Coleman & Farris-Dufrene, 1996; Moschini, 2005; Simonds, 1994)

Art therapy or ‘any therapy that applies self-expressive art as their prime therapy activity’ has survived within the American therapeutic community for decades (Crochan, 1996, p. 287). In 1940, Edith Kramer first observed the natural healing properties of art activities with children (as mentioned in Waller, 2006). By the 1950s the concept of using the natural coping mechanisms of drawing and play to reveal the unconscious mind of children emerged (Vick, 2003; Malchiodi, 2005; Waller, 2006). This latest viewpoint uses the expressive qualities of poetry, storytelling, and story writing to have children tell their narratives (Vick, 2003; Malchiodi, 2005; Waller, 2006). In this innovative outline, therapists, educators, and child development specialists make use of the expressive arts of music, visual arts, storytelling, drama, and dance to get in touch with children (Malchiodi, 2005; Waller, 2006).

While the present research has not found a cause and effect relationship, there is a strong correlation between art and improvements in a child’s social and academic performance ( Cochran, 1996; Matarasso, 1997; Schirmacher, 2006; Boldt & Brooks, 2006). This correlation exists because the scenery of art provides children a positive alternative for expressing themselves, a better opportunity for relating to others, and an added investment in one’s community (Isaacs, 1977; Clemens, 1991; Cochran, 1996; Matarasso, 1997; Schirmacher, 2006; Boldt & Brooks, 2006).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Employing art to make easy the healing process with children has a long history within the helping professions of psychiatry, child development, and education (Vick, 2003; Malchiodi, 2005; Waller, 2006). In this study, the break up between helping professionals directs practice and the literature. The next section provides insight into a basic definition of art and the forms it can take within the therapeutic setting. The researcher also displayed the important concept of expressive art therapies in relation to the four classifications of art.

### Expressive therapy/Art and its classification

The definition of art is something that is based on others opinions or feelings rather than on facts. This subjectivity, in turn, makes art's function, purpose, and status within a community different based on the cultural values, perspectives, and context (Janlongo & Stamp, 1997). For the purpose of this project, art will be defined broadly as the capability to make creative interpretations which are "enjoyed for the beauty they create, the way they present ideas, or for the process in which they are formed" (Encarta, 2004). With this definition, one can include any artistic expression no matter its cultural or societal interpretations.

There is a difference between art for pleasure and self-expressive art exercises within therapy sessions (Cochran, 1996; Rogers, 2001; Malchiodi, 2005). While both forms have advantages for children, art for pleasure has limited amounts of self-disclosure and self-exploration. This results in having less therapeutic or healing effects on children than self-expressive art exercises (Cochran, 1996; Rogers, 2001; Malchiodi, 2005). Based on this perception and the broad definition of art, the researcher examined four classifications of expressive arts from the literature. These are: 1) music or any therapeutic/healing application of arranging or exposing one to sound, 2) visual arts or employing the depictions of images for therapy/healing, 3) storytelling or the symbolic application of words, in either a written or verbal form, to promote healing/therapy, 4) drama or any therapeutic/healing use of role play, enactment, or theater; and, 5) dance or any healing/therapeutic work utilizing movement of an individual or group (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997; Simmons, 1997; Malchiodi, 2005; Schirmacher, 2006).

### **Expressive Art Therapies**

Based on the understanding of different types of expressive arts, it is vital to understand the concept of expressive art therapies verses traditional art therapy. Expressive art therapies also lend themselves to a variety of environmental settings including psychotherapy, counseling, schools, rehabilitation, or According to the school administration, for teachers and other helping professions to effectively assist children they must be able to use "the hundred languages of children...[including] role play, dance, music, and art for the children to explore their open ideas and to communicate them to others" (as cited in Anning, 1999, p. 168). There is a significant amount of information to show that expressive arts benefit children.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Scientific research has again and again revealed that art in therapy has physical, cognitive, psychological, and social benefits for children. These benefits have resulted in use of expressive art therapies by therapists, educators, and child development specialists (Vick, 2003; Malchiodi, 2005;

Waller, 2006). Even though other professions have shown the benefits of art therapy for children, the use of this therapy has barely begun to realize these benefits. This is reflected in the gap between the profession's direct practices and its literature regarding the therapeutic use of art with children. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to obtain awareness about using art therapy and the possible benefits it has for practices. By doing so the researcher hoped to establish the use of expressive art on her professional practice in the future.

**Sample:** The study was carried out among 57 helping professional's who were working at NGO's catering HIV positive children. The sample was drawn using a stratified sampling method, from Bangalore north, south, east, west and central regions.

**Materials:** The setting the researcher used was the classrooms hosting graduate helping professional's (both first and second years) at California State University Sacramento, Division of Social Work. In order to explain the gap between helping professional's use of expressive art in their direct practice and the social work literature, she distributed a self-created questionnaire. This questionnaire had 46 statements based on a Yes-No and Likert-Scale formats. It is estimated by the researcher to have taken the participants up to twenty minutes to complete.

**Procedure:** 46 statements in the questionnaire were divided into three sections entitled art benefits, art utilization, and defining art and art in therapy. These questions were developed by the researcher. The Art Benefits section was designed to assess the participants' knowledge on the benefits of arts based on the four major benefits: physical, cognitive, psychological and social-academic. The second section, titled Art Unitization, was meant to measure the participants' use of the art forms music, visual arts, storytelling, drama, and dance within their current and potential clients. Defining art and art in therapy was the final section of the survey and it was designed to find out the participants' view of what art is and how it takes shape in the therapeutic setting. This information would, in turn, allow the researcher to gain insight into the participants' answers in the previous sections of the survey. The other testing material the researcher used was an informed consent form that underlines participants' rights, confidentiality, and possible risk and benefits of participation.

### LIMITATIONS

There are two limitations to the experiment. The first limitation lies within the sample used for the study. By having a small sample size and using only helping professional's catering HIV positive children, the experiment was not representative of the overall population of other professionals which include psychologists, counselors helping professional's etc.,. This means that the results only apply to helping professional's working with HIV positive children and not to the overall population. The other limitation to

this study was the researcher’s choice to not use a pre-established survey to collect data. This is a limitation because the questionnaire has no preference to support its reliability and/or validity; therefore, the questionnaire needs further testing to confirm its results.

**RESULTS & DISSCUSION**

**Benefits of Art**

The first section of the questionnaire focused on assessing the participant’s awareness of art benefits. These benefits were physical, cognitive, psychological, social-academic and spiritual. The questions are based on the Yes/No format.

Table 1: *Art benefits motor skills*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	57	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 2: *Art benefits physical health*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	50	87.7	87.7	87.7
not sure	7	12.3	12.3	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

When discovering the participants’ views regarding arts’ impact on physical health, 87.7% (n=50) agreed that art enhances children’s overall physical health. Only 12.3% (n=7) were unsure about arts’ role in improving a child’s physical health. This can be compared with 100% (n=57) of participants who felt that art can improve motor development. The simple action of creating and producing art has many physical benefits for children. Robert Schirmacher (2006) stated that art is important for a child’s physical development because it allows them to use their gross and fine motor skills.

Table 3: *Art develops critical thinking*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	40	70.2	70.2	70.2
no	3	5.3	5.3	75.4

not sure	14	24.6	24.6	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Art strengthens the connections in the brain

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	56	98.2	98.2	98.2
not sure	1	1.8	1.8	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

When assessing for participants' knowledge on the cognitive benefits of art, 70.2% (n=40) felt art enhances critical thinking while 5.3% (n=3) did not and 24.6% (n=14) were unsure of this affect. In comparison, 98.2% (n=56) of participants believed that art strengthens the connections within the brain and 1.8% (n=1) was unsure about this event. While there is a slight discrepancy, both questions prove that the majority of the participants believed that art provides cognitive growth in children. Edwards (1984) found that art education was vital in evolving the right side of the brain in children because it is used to form symbolism, develop nonverbal expression, and recognize patterns and shapes.

Table 5: Art adds to one's wellbeing

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	50	87.7	87.7	87.7
not sure	7	12.3	12.3	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: Art benefits mental health

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	57	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 7: Art builds self-esteem

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid	Cumulative
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			Percent	Percent
Valid yes	56	98.2	98.2	98.2
No	1	1.8	1.8	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

The participants had a relatively consistent view of the positive benefits art has on children's psychological state. When asked if art can enhance one's overall emotional well-being, 87.7% (n=50) of participants agreed and 12.3 % (n=7) were unsure. Again these high numbers were repeated when 100% (n=57) of participants agreed that art improved one's mental health. In both instances, no participants disagreed with the concept that art has psychological benefits for children. Yet, 98.2% (n=56) of participants agreed that art improves one's self-esteem where as 1.8% (n=1) disagreed. Wilson and Saunders' study (2005), for example, revealed that participation in art classes, no matter the form, improved a child's self-esteem and self-expression.

Table 8: *Art's role in a child's development*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	57	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 9: *Art improves academic-social success*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	57	100.0	100.0	100.0

Whether or not art can play a critical role in formulating a child's academic and social skill was another benefit of art assessed by this survey. In regards to a child's overall development, 100% (n=57) of participants believed art enhances childhood development. On the other hand, 100% (n=57) all the participants felt art can help in improving a child's academic and social success. This consistency could have been shaped by the participant's definitions of development. The term development is often associated with only physical highlights (gross/fine motor skills) versus emotional or cognitive ones. The nature of art gives children a positive alternative for expressing themselves, a better avenue for relating to others, and an increased investment in one's community (Isaacs, 1977; Clemens, 1991; Cochran, 1996; Matarasso, 1997; Schirmacher, 2006; Boldt & Brooks, 2006).

Table 10: *Tapping into spirituality*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	21	36.8	36.8	36.8
No	2	3.5	3.5	40.4
not sure	34	59.6	59.6	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

When discovering participants' views on art and spirituality, 36.8 (n=21) of participants felt that art can be used to tap into one's spirituality while 3.5% (n=2) did not agree and 59.6% (n=34) were unsure about this. These numbers were higher than predicted because spirituality is a new concept in the field of art therapy. Moreover, the goal of being "material" has dominated scientific research even in eastern world since the 19th century. Research on art, art therapy, and the enrichment of a child's spirituality is limited. One reason for this limitation is the difficulty researchers have had in scientifically defining and measuring the concept of spirituality (Malchiodi, 1998; Mountain, 2007).

**Utilization of Art**

Discovering which expressive art forms the participants utilized in their work with clients was the second portion of the survey. The expressive art forms examined were music, visual arts, storytelling, drama, and dance. These questions were based on a Likert-Scale formatting ranging from always using to never using in their work.

Table 11: *Have their clients listen to music in therapy*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Usually	29	50.9	50.9	50.9
rarely	28	49.1	49.1	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

Considering music, 50.9% (n=29) of participants usually have their clients listen to it and 49.1% (n=28) rarely or never use music in therapy. A prime illustration of this practice with children is the scientific confirmation of the Mozart Effect in which listening to classical music in the womb and



during infancy improves academic abilities (Campbell, 1997; Thompson, Schellenburg, & Husain, 2001).

Table 12: *Have their clients draw in therapy*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Usually	28	49.1	49.1	49.1
rarely	29	50.9	50.9	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

Table 13: *Have their clients color in therapy*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Usually	11	19.3	19.3	19.3
rarely	46	80.7	80.7	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

Table 14: *Have their clients paint in therapy*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Usually	28	49.1	49.1	49.1
rarely	29	50.9	50.9	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

Out of the participants analyzed, none of the participants report that they always use drawing in their work with clients whereas 49.1% (n=28) usually use and 50.9 (n=29) rarely use drawing in therapy. Similar numbers continued with other art mediums despite drawing being the most researched in art therapy. For example, none of the participants always used and 19.3% (n=11) usually use coloring in therapy whereas 80.7% (n=46) of participants rarely applied it with their clients. Again, these numbers are seen with painting with 49.1% (n=28) usually utilize painting, This is compared to 50.9% (n=29) who rarely used painting. The similar range of numbers among the visual arts medium is influenced by social definitions of “art” in terms of visual depictions. In addition, therapists, helping professional’s, and other helping professionals are more likely to have access to the supplies used to create visual arts.

Table 15: *Have their clients do role play in therapy*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Rarely	57	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 16: *Have their clients use expressive toys in therapy*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Usually	22	38.6	38.6	38.6
Rarely	35	61.4	61.4	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

One of the first techniques that helping professionals learn in their formal education is the process of role play in which the practitioner and the client act out and solve a particular dilemma. From the participants analyzed, none of the participants always or usually applied role play as a therapeutic technique. In contrast, 100% (n=57) of participants “ reported that they rarely use utilized role play with their clients. These types of numbers continue with the participants” use of expressive toys, such as puppets. Only 38.6% (n=22) of participates stated to usually employ expressive toys compared with 61.4 (n=35) who rarely employ or never employed them.

Table 17: *Have their clients dance in therapy*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Rarely	57	100.0	100.0	100.0

When asked whether or not they use dance with their clients, none of the participants reported that they always or usually use dance therapy. Whereas, 100% (n=57) all participants analyzed reported that they rarely used dance within their work. The significantly higher percentage of participants who reported to rarely utilize dance may be affected by a variety of environmental factors such as a lack of space, time to allow for dance and the relative “newness” of research on dance’s therapeutic benefits.

Table 18: *Have clients tell their story in therapy*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Usually	57	100.0	100.0	100.0

In regards to storytelling, 100% (n= 57) all participants” analyzed reported to usually have their clients” tell their story as a part of therapy. This higher rate of usage is reflective of the popularity of client-centered approaches, such as Narrative Therapy. It may also be affected by storytelling needing no supplies or a certain environment. Moreover, the utilization of storytelling enhances the therapeutic relationship by promoting trust, increasing active listening, and fostering reliance, optimism, and dialogue (West, 2002).

Table 19: *Have their clients journal in therapy*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid never	57	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 20: *Have their clients write in therapy*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Rarely	21	36.8	36.8	36.8
never	36	63.2	63.2	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

When looking at story writing, the survey showed that 100% (n=57) of participants never employed journals in therapy and never used journaling with clients. In comparison, 35.8% (n=21) of participants reported to rarely have their clients write their story 43.2% (n=36) who never had their clients write in therapy.

### Definitions of Art

The final section of this survey was designed to find out the participant” s definition of the overall concept of art. It also looked at the participants” view of specific categories of art. The questions in the section are also based on the Yes/No format.

Table 21: *Art is common in all human societies*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	8	14.0	14.0	14.0
No	7	12.3	12.3	26.3
not	42	73.7	73.7	100.0

sure				
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

Table 22: Art functions differently between communities

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	10	17.5	17.5	17.5
No	5	8.8	8.8	26.3
Not sure	42	73.7	73.7	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

When asked whether or not art is common among all human societies, 14.0% (n=8) of participants said yes, 12.3% (n=7) of participants reported they did not agree with and 73.7% (n=42) were unsure if art is common among all human cultures. Similar trends continued with 17.5 (n=10) of participants agreeing that art’s functions differs based on the community, 8.8% (n=5) who did not agree with and 73.7% (n=42) were unsure about this difference.

Table 23: There is a difference in art for pleasure and self-expression

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No	32	56.1	56.1	56.1
not sure	25	43.9	43.9	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

Out of the participants analyzed, 56.1% (n=32) did not agree that there is a difference in art for pleasure and self-expression. Yet, 43.9% (n=25) were unsure if this difference existed. The near fifty-fifty split of the participants’ answers is a critical finding since it shows that the participants were less aware of this difference. This unawareness may explain the overall lower rates of utilization of art forms of visual arts, music, and drama by the participants than anticipated by the researcher (see last section).

Table 24: Music is a form of art

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid	Cumulative
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			Percent	Percent
Valid	yes	43	75.4	75.4
	No	1	1.8	77.2
	not sure	13	22.8	100.0
	Total	57	100.0	100.0

Table 25: *Drama is a form of art*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid not sure	57	100.0	100.0	100.0

When assessing what art forms the participants accepted as art (a part for visual arts) the researcher looked at music, drama, and dance. The researcher hypothesized that what mediums the participants accepted as art would influence their use of these arts. In regards to music as a form of art 75.4% (n=43) accepted these as art while only 1.8% (n=1) disagreed and 22.8% (13) were unsure. The numbers slightly increased with Drama as 100.0% (n=57) agreed it was an art form. This discovery shows that while the participants accept music, drama, and dance as art, it does not affect their level of utilization in therapy.

Table 26: *Visual Arts is the process of employing depictions*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid not sure	57	100.0	100.0	100.0

When asked if visual arts (drawing, coloring, painting) in therapy is a process of employing depictions for healing, 100% (n=57) of those analyzed were not sure with this statement. This finding was important because it allowed the term visual arts to encompass both the client's exposure to and creation of visual art works. Based on the results, the majority of participants were unsure with the researcher's definition for visual arts.

Table 27: *Storytelling is a form of art*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid	Cumulative
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			Percent	Percent
Valid Yes	41	71.9	71.9	71.9
not sure	16	28.1	28.1	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

Table 28: *Story writing is a form of art*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Rarely	21	36.8	36.8	36.8
never	36	63.2	63.2	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

Table 29: *Storytelling is the use of words in therapy*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	10	17.5	17.5	17.5
No	7	12.3	12.3	29.8
not sure	40	70.2	70.2	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

When defining storytelling as a person's use of words in either a written or oral form, 17.5% (n=10) of participants analyzed agreed versus 70.2% (n=40) being unsure about the definition and 12.3% (n=7) disagree with this definition of storytelling. In regards to whether or not storytelling is an art form, 71.9% (n=41) reported yes while 28.1% (n=16) reported unsure. Similarly, 36.8% (n=21) of participants rarely agreed that story writing was an art form and 63.2% (n=36) who disagreed the statement. These three questions are linked because they all center on storytelling as a therapeutic technique. Moreover, the consistency among these questions adds validity to the findings in regards to storytelling as an accepted art form by participants.

Table 30: *Art's healing ability is supported by culture and science*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

Valid	yes	40	70.2	70.2	70.2
	no	1	1.8	1.8	71.9
	not sure	16	28.1	28.1	100.0
	Total	57	100.0	100.0	

The confirmation of art's healing abilities by culture and science is highly accepted by the participants in this study as 70.2% (n=40) agreed with this statement. Only 28.1% (n=8) reported to not sure and 1.8% (n=1) reported disagreeing outright with this statement. This means that the majority of participants believed that art's facilitation of healing is supported. Yet, many of them still do not fully use these art forms in their work with clients as found in the low utilization rates.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this study the researcher embarked to emphasize the difference between direct practice and research regarding the use of art by helping professionals. In order to accomplish this goal, the researcher looked at three objectives: 1) to discover helping professional's level of knowledge on the benefits of arts for children; 2) to find out if helping professional's apply the expressive arts in their work; and, 3) to reveal helping professional's definitions of art.

**Knowledge on the benefits of arts:** The findings revealed that helping professional's are generally knowledgeable about the benefits of arts for children. The result also reveal that 60% the participants agreed that art can enhance physical health, increase cognitive and social-academic growth, and improve psychological well-being. Ironically, the majority of the participants did not have any formal education in art therapy.

**Application of art in therapy.** Based on the high rate of participants who were aware of art benefits, it would be reasonable to assume that they would have greatly utilized art with their clients. Yet, the survey revealed this was not the case for the majority of the expressive art forms. Less than 30% of participants, for instance, used drama and visual arts with their clients Dance was the least used with around 6% of participants employing this technique in their practice on a regular basis. On the other hand, music was the most utilized of the expressive art forms with an estimated 80% using oral storytelling and 50% using written storytelling techniques with their clientele. The researcher believes that if participants are not exposed to these techniques and allowed to practice them within the academic setting, then they will be less likely to use them within the field. These findings show that

the disconnection between research and practice goes beyond an overlooked direct practice techniques as first hypothesized by the researcher. Instead, it illustrates a significant lacking in education around art therapy.

**Definitions of art and art in therapy.** By understanding the participants' view of what art is and how it takes shape in the therapeutic setting, the researcher hoped to gain insight into their answers in the previous sections. One example is that nearly 50% of the participants felt that making a craft project had the same affect as expressive art assignments. This is significant because if the participants believed art for pleasure and self-expressive art have the same therapeutic value, then they are less likely to use their limited time and resources on these types of activities. This unawareness among participants, as stated before, is due to their lack of exposure to the practical applications of art therapy within their educational experiences.

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