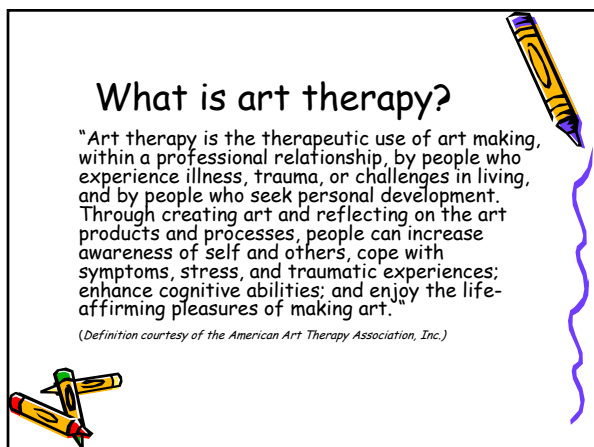


INTEGRATING ART THERAPY PRACTICES INTO THE CLASSROOM:

TOOLS FOR ENRICHING THE COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS OF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM



What is art therapy?

"Art therapy is the therapeutic use of art making, within a professional relationship, by people who experience illness, trauma, or challenges in living, and by people who seek personal development. Through creating art and reflecting on the art products and processes, people can increase awareness of self and others, cope with symptoms, stress, and traumatic experiences; enhance cognitive abilities; and enjoy the life-affirming pleasures of making art."

(Definition courtesy of the American Art Therapy Association, Inc.)



Some other ideas:

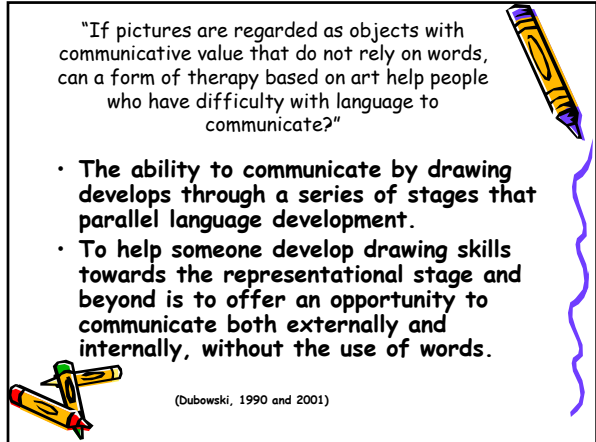
- "A therapeutic process
- A vehicle for communication
- A form of personal expression
- A method for resolving conflicts
- A way in which to develop insight
- A modality to foster self-awareness
- A symbolic language
- A way to get in touch with one's environment
- A process that develops self-esteem
- A method to increase understanding
- An avenue to release pent-up feelings
- A way to gain control over emotions
- A way to connect feelings and behaviors
- A process that develops focusing abilities
- A method for improving concept formation
- A way to promote body image
- A facilitator for social competency"

* From The Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) Clinical Art Therapy Program : http://arttherapy.dadeschools.net/about_art_therapy.htm

"If pictures are regarded as objects with communicative value that do not rely on words, can a form of therapy based on art help people who have difficulty with language to communicate?"

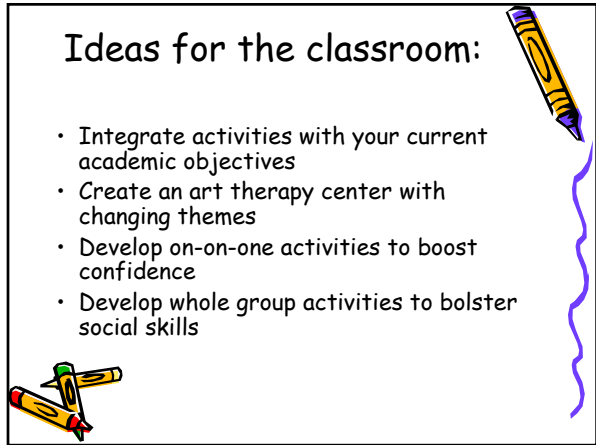
- The ability to communicate by drawing develops through a series of stages that parallel language development.
- To help someone develop drawing skills towards the representational stage and beyond is to offer an opportunity to communicate both externally and internally, without the use of words.

(Dubowski, 1990 and 2001)



Ideas for the classroom:

- Integrate activities with your current academic objectives
- Create an art therapy center with changing themes
- Develop on-on-one activities to boost confidence
- Develop whole group activities to bolster social skills



Materials: What do you need to get started?

- A wide range of materials should be available: clay, cookie cutters, paints, different types and sizes of paper, different brushes, sponges, crayons, sand, water, toys, pencils, etc.
- Be creative! Anything can be used to create art!
- Limit access to a specific set of materials for each activity in order to build a variety of skills with different mediums. Build a comfort level with the art products.
- Once skills are developed and preferences are determined, allow for freedom of choice.
- Freedom of choice needs its limits: constantly strive for new forms of expression and encourage experimentation!



Assessing?

Assessment will be a series of questions that help you determine the quality of the interaction and the progress made over time.

For example, Does the student:

- explore materials?
- show curiosity?
- seek attention?
- engage in turn-taking interactions?
- accept and/or react to new materials and ideas?
- use language? In what way?



Resources

- The American Art Therapy Association, Inc.
www.arttherapy.org
- School Art Therapy
www.schoolarttherapy.com
- VSA Arts
www.vsarts.org
- Florida Art Therapy Association
www.floridaarttherapy.org
- M-DCPS Clinical Art Therapy Department
arttherapy.dadeschools.net



Reflections & Notes