

USING ART AS A TOOL FOR PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT  
WITHIN A TRADITIONAL ART CURRICULM

By

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A CAPSTONE PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS OF THE  
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To All Those Who Use Art as  
a Form of Self- Empowerment

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ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF FINE  
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**ABSTRACT**

In today's society many of youth are faced with more and more difficulties including but not limited to depression, anxiety, violence, addictions, changes in family dynamics, and financial difficulties. Indeed, students today lead complex lives, fraught with disappointments and difficulties. Furthermore, the lack of available creative and emotional outlets for our students today suggest a need for adapting our school art curricula to include art activities that provide opportunities for students to reflect on and express aspects about the complexities and difficulties of their lives. I maintain in this paper that the inclusion of certain expressive art projects into the traditional art curriculum at all grade levels would address the aforementioned problems. Art classes already act as an outlet for our youth to engage creative learning activities that stand

apart from the daily stressors and traditional academic material of the typical school curriculum. With the inclusion of particular kinds of expressive art activities implemented into today's art curricula, art educators could facilitate students' sense of personal knowledge and empowerment.

My goal with this capstone project is to test these assertions in my own art program, and to document how students respond to expressive arts activities that I have designed for them. These expressive art activities will be integrated within my traditional art classroom curricula. For this research project I have designed, taught, and studied what happens in these learning activities, and I have created a web site for teachers who are similarly looking to integrate the expressive arts into their already established art curriculum. My website includes helpful links, projects ideas, photographs of my teaching journal and student work ([expressiveartsincurriculum.weebly.com](http://expressiveartsincurriculum.weebly.com)).

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The expressive arts are an approach to art making that focuses heavily on the expression of one's personal feelings and experiences. In a school art curriculum, the expressive arts are just one type of art making that can be used to facilitate student creative self-expression and self-empowerment. The purpose of my study is to find how students respond to specific expressive art activities that are integrated into a traditional art curriculum. My expressive arts-oriented lessons are designed to encourage student self-expression, reflection, and empowerment. I am interested in this approach because of my own personal experience with using art as a form of reflection and emotional release for myself. For my entire life, I have suffered from anorexia, bulimia, depression, and anxiety. Art has been an avenue for me to express my feelings about my diseases and disorders. Although I make no claims that expressive arts will similarly provide my students with equally positive benefits, and I have no personal knowledge about my students' own personal difficulties and psychological afflictions, I believe that sharing such an expressive arts approach with our youth will show them that art can be an outlet for them as it has been for me. I hope that their continued engagement with expressive art making, as they encounter life beyond my classroom or this academic year, will empower them for years to come.

Studies have shown that art making has been found to be beneficial to children who have been subjected to stressful events in their lives (Darley & Heath, 2007). With this beneficial potential in mind, I would like to expand my art curriculum to include lessons that expose students to art activities that will enable them to express their feelings, experiences, and problems. I believe that other art programs might similarly

include expressive arts as part of their programming. Including such expressive arts programming in a traditional school art curriculum requires that I first identify activities that students react to most positively. From there, I would hope that expressive arts would eventually be added to our national, state, and local school art curricula.

I began my research for this project by creating and integrating expressive art activities into my traditionally designed art curriculum that already existed within my classroom. This curriculum adheres to the art learning standards in my state, the New Generation Sunshine State Standards. Second, I sought and gained permission to conduct this study from my school, and from both the students and their parent(s) of my first period 2-D Composition I (aka 2-D Comp I) class that I teach at Riverview High School in Riverview, Florida. I have also sought and received approval for this study from the University of Florida Institutional Research Board. My first period 2-D Comp I class comprising my study group consisted of 35 students ranging in ages 14- 19, with 14 males and 21 females, and representing various cultural backgrounds. I implemented and studied three different art projects with this study group. These projects consisted of a cultural self-portrait, a postcard to never send, and mood painting to music. Within my first period 2-D Comp classroom, I observed and recorded the students' responses to these specific art projects and I photographed their artwork. During the study, I also asked students to give me informal verbal feedback during class sessions, to fill out surveys, and also to keep an artists' journal of their own. I then used the data I collected from these observations, conversations, photographs, journals, and surveys to determine how students responded and which activities students responded

to most positively within this classroom. The remainder of this paper further explains my study goals, activities and findings.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In conducting research for my study, I began to see there was a lack of readily available resources and research in the area of the expressive arts being integrated into traditional K-12 school art curricula. I searched for writings and art projects that fit into a New Generation Florida Sunshine State Standards-based art curriculum, but that also included the expressive arts within these lessons. I felt the need to study and collect evidence about what high school students think about projects that follow the Sunshine State Standards but also have the expressive arts activities integrated into them. I found that there were no writings about expressive art projects that had been tested by Florida high school teachers and that fit under the Sunshine State Standards. Without studying this topic and finding how students respond to such art making approaches, we may never see the implementation of the expressive arts into the traditional art curriculum.

### **Significance of Project**

Today in America and across the world, there are rising problems in local communities that greatly affect children and their families. Some of the issues that have risen as a result of our current economic recession include homelessness, unemployment, rise in cost of living, family disputes over finances, hunger, and cuts of funding to education. As a result of these devastating conditions, I have seen students being affected emotionally by the aforementioned issues and in turn, I have seen that some of my students have lowered self- esteem and are more stressed than ever before. With this disturbing trend, I also see that students sometimes “act out” to get

attention, or ask for help by getting in trouble, failing classes, doing drugs, or even worse harming others or themselves. I feel that these negative ways of “acting out” might be reduced by providing students with supportive, structured opportunities to reflect on and share their feelings about life circumstances. The implementation of expressive arts into the traditional art curricula that fosters student self-reflection and self-empowerment is one such way. As art educators, I feel we need to do what is best for our students and to look for new ways to help them succeed in school and in life. Art is one of those tools that could help students tremendously by teaching them how to identify, understand, and express their emotions in a healthy way. I know that there are already some art teachers implementing the expressive arts and other innovative projects into their curricula, but not enough. I believe that my study can help other art educators as well as myself, to create an overall art stronger art program. I also believe with this type of art curriculum that teachers can become more in touch with the realities of their students’ lives and as a result, teachers would have an improved rapport with their students.

### **Limitations**

In order to complete this study successfully, I had to set some of my own personal preferences aside regarding what art projects I felt were the best for the students, and let the results from the data collected tell the story. Additionally, there are constraints of time (my research took place over only a few weeks), age levels (my research was conducted with high school students, and a lack of participation from the other art teachers and students in my school district. In other words, my findings are generalizable only to my own classroom. Through my study, I will only be able to follow

and describe students' experience and progress through a course of a few months rather than years, which also means that I will never know the long term benefits of such an approach to art curriculum planning. This study will only show the short-term effects from the use of the expressive arts in my classroom. Since I was the only teacher conducting this study, the results are limited to the specific cultural and age groups of the students who participated at my school. An additional limitation is that students could act differently because they are aware that the study is going on, which may skew the results and cause some discrepancies. To address this "spotlight" effect, I have attempted to seamlessly integrate the expressive activities into already existing projects in order to minimize students' tendencies to behave differently just because they are participants in a study.

In this study, I will not attempt to diagnose or recommend psychological treatment for students based on their behaviors or artwork. I am not a trained psychologist or art therapist and will leave that up to those in that profession. I will not attempt to give art therapy to students. Rather, I will introduce them to the expressive art lessons. I will show them the arts can serve as a form of reflection and self-empowerment for them and have positive effects on their self-esteem.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The topics I researched for my project included how the arts are used as a tool for self-expression, healing, and empowerment. The literature I looked at could be further broken down into three categories: Art Therapy/Expressive Arts in Schools, Art Therapy/Expressive Arts with Children and Adolescents, and Expressive Art Activities. In these specific areas, there are educators, theorists, and authors who have worked in and studied expressive arts the within the field of art education. These include Elliot Eisner, Viktor Lowenfeld, and Sir Herbert Read, and more recently, Cathy Malchiodi and Rebecca Plummer Rohloff. These scholars and art educators believed that the arts were beneficial for all who participated in them, but they differ in the ways they define the expressive/ creative arts.

A precise definition for the *expressive arts* still remains unclear, even though there has been more research on the topic in the past couple decades. When looking online, you can find various definitions of what people believe to be the expressive arts. From the various definitions, I propose a well-rounded definition that I feel we can all follow as art educators. For the purpose of this study, I define expressive arts as follows: *The “expressive arts” are a form of art making that allows for the individual to embrace creative self-expression, reflection, and self-empowerment.*

This definition encapsulates many the current definitions regarding what the expressive arts are. With this said, another question arises: “ What makes the expressive arts different from the regular art curriculum in place throughout public education today?” I feel that this is a question that needs to be answered to allow for my audience to fully realize the importance of my study. Currently, many art programs

across the United States follow a standards-based orientation, one that is strongly aligned with Discipline-based art education (DBAE). DBAE focuses highly on the cultural and historical aspects of art (Clark, Day, & Greer, 1987). This approach to art education tends to minimize personal self-expression due to the intense focus on learning the language of art (elements and principles), demonstrating understanding of that language in art products created in the classroom, rather than focusing on the intimate and personal aspects of the processes and meanings of making the art itself. More and more, I see children come into my classroom who “don’t know how” to *be creative*. They struggle to just make art freely and allow themselves to just be expressive and make art just for the sake of making it. I find that our art students need the freedom to be creative and to make art that is purely expressive and more about the process of the making of it rather than how perfect it is in the end.

Art educators who also believed in this type of art making included Elliot Eisner, Viktor Lowenfeld, and Sir Herbert Read. Moreover, in Elliot Eisner’s book, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (2004), Eisner mentions the two art educators he felt were very influential in the world of art education for promoting creative self-expression. In his text, Eisner (2004) mentions how “Read and Lowenfeld both believed the arts to be a process that emancipated the spirit and provided an outlet for the creative impulse (p. 32). Lowenfeld also believed that that the creative impulse had a therapeutic benefit along with an educational benefit (Eisner, 2004). Lowenfeld observed that a child who used the arts as a creative activity and an emotional outlet would gain a sense of freedom, flexibility, and release of tension (Eisner, 2004). In a another article by Eisner (2001), “Should We Create New Aims in Art Education?” Eisner explains his experience

in the classroom with the creative/ expressive arts. “Although we can emphasize in our discussions academic content, artistic forms of learning, and ways of dealing with accountability, ultimately we are concerned with students and with their overall development as well as their particular development in the arts. I know as a former high school art teacher that some of the most gratifying moments in my teaching life, including the time that I have been at Stanford, were during episodes in my art room in which I touched a student's life or a student touched mine. Such relationships with others, with what is said to them, how they are supported, the vision we help them form of their own possibilities are among the most important things we teach, whether we are teaching art or social studies, whether the subject is mathematics or physics. The student and his or her life is what we must most deeply care about. The arts in the plural and the visual arts in particular are enhancements of life, but what a teacher as a human being contributes to his or her students' lives exceeds the scope of art, even when the arts are conceptualized in their widest form” (Eisner, 2001, p. 10). I could not agree more with Eisner as he shares the same views that I have towards the expressive arts in the classroom. He offers many compelling reasons for why teachers would want to integrate more creative/ expressive arts projects into their curriculum. Students and teachers would benefit not just artistically, but also emotionally, making them more flexible when it comes to changes in life and in the classroom, not to mention be less stressed by relieving their tension through the making of the art.

Another art scholar who also believes that the expressive arts are beneficial to children and adolescents is Cathy A. Malchiodi. Malchiodi is a leading writer and author in the fields of art therapy and expressive art therapies. Malchiodi has published many

books on different subjects relating to the expressive arts and how they can be used in the medical, psychiatric, and educational fields. In one of her books, *Expressive Therapies* (2006), Malchiodi believes the expressive arts/ art therapy to be “ a therapeutic means or reconciling emotional conflicts, fostering self-awareness, developing social skills, managing behavior, solving problems, reducing anxiety aiding reality orientation, and increasing self-esteem” (p. 2). These are all important life skills for children and adolescents to develop in order to be successful students and eventually become adults. Too many students in today’s society seem to lack many of these skills, which were once taught by parents and reinforced within strong communities. Now, it is the educator’s responsibility to help raise and parent children to become productive and responsible citizens in society.

Another art educator who has had a heightened interest in the expressive arts is an art education professor at Salem State University in Massachusetts, Rebecca Plummer Rohloff. Rohloff studied the expressive arts for many years. She also studied the role of arts in medicine in the summer of 2007 at the University of Florida’s Shand’s Hospital. Rohloff used her studies at Shands to create an approach to art making she labeled the *Imaginarium* series. Rohloff’s *Imaginarium* seeks to tap into the power of the creative/expressive arts and how it can help adults as well children to discover their own personal histories, and purposes in society. An added benefit of Rohloff’s *Imaginarium* approach is increased self- knowledge and increased self-esteem (Rohloff, 2008). With this study, Rohloff created her own artistic journals to document her research, ideas, and findings.

For my own research study, used Rohloff's Shand's journal, *Arts in Medicine Imaginarium IV* (2007) as a reference. In this journal, Rohloff documents her research on the history of the arts being used to aid in the well being of humans. This has informed my study by demonstrating to me that the expressive arts have been used to help improve a person's self-esteem and well-being for many years, all the way back to the Greeks and Egyptians (Rohloff, 2007). I was so inspired by the beauty and depth of meaning of her journal, that I decided to make my own artist-journal as a part of my capstone project for the Masters' degree (see Figures 1 and 2). I hope one day to incorporate these types of journals into my classroom as a student assignment.



Figure 1: Jennifer Costello Mackey, Artist's Journal, Front Cover and Page, Multi-Media

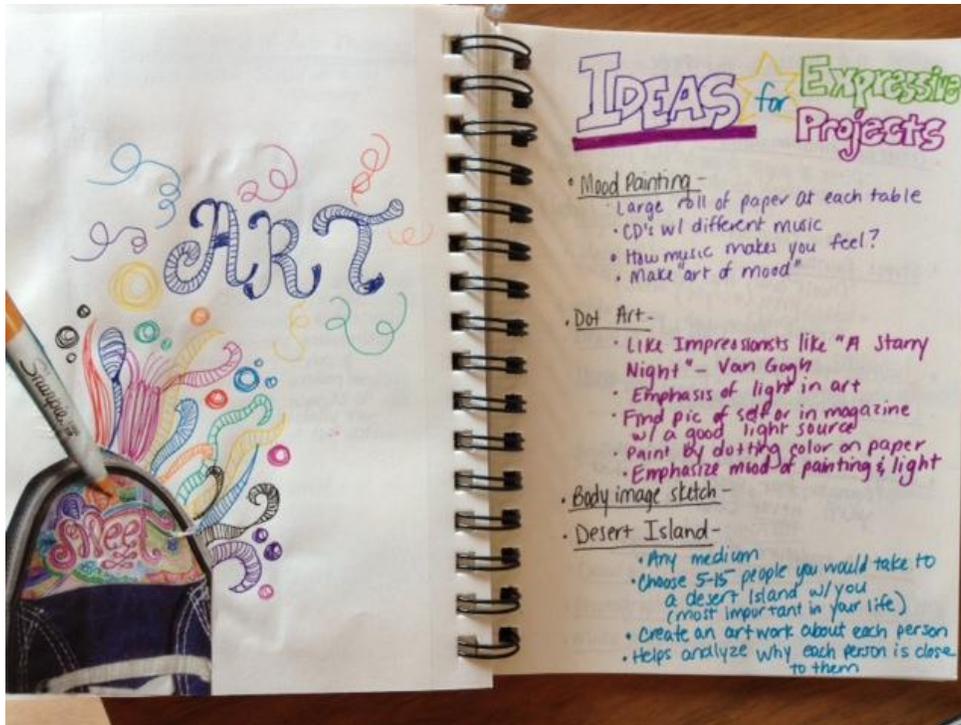


Figure 2: Jennifer Costello Mackey. Artist's Journal Spread, Marker and Collage

Rohloff also inspired me through some of the points she made in her dissertation for her degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2008. In her dissertation, she mentions that, "An arts education that points learners towards the discovery of their own internal, creative agency and responsibility, contributes to the renewal of culture and society" (Rohloff, 2008, p.2). This statement was very powerful to me because it is a goal I have for my art education curriculum. I want my art curriculum not to be just about art techniques, art elements, and art history. I want my art curriculum to be something that affords life-changing inquiry for my students. As Rohloff (2008) mentions, "Within the experiences of painting, drawing, and collage, the creative process is a passionate and compassionate dialogue—a reality check and a reminder of my truest identity, purpose, and

responsibility to the human community” (p.10). I want the arts to make such an impact on my students as it has for both Rohloff and I. I want my students to realize that art can be used as a tool to express their emotions and creativity.

### *My Own Narrative*

At this point, it is useful to readers to know something more about my own passion for this approach to art making and art education. Since I was a child, I have used art to help me deal with life’s changes and challenges. Mostly, I used it to overcome one of the most challenging battles, which was the fight for my life. In 2007, at the age of 23, I became anorexic and an exercise bulimic. I got down to 81 pounds and was in danger of dying. I finally got to the point of what addicts call, “Rock Bottom,” and sought help at a local inpatient rehabilitation program. After 45 days of what I would call a living hell, I had to face reality and be integrated back into a “normal” life and try to not go back to my addictions in the real world. In order to do this, I turned to Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Overeaters Anonymous groups to have someone to talk to and share my feeling with, and also my art. In the spring of 2008, my last semester of college and the semester after being released from treatment, I decided to do my senior thesis show on Anorexia and Bulimia to educate others about the diseases and also to help myself express how I was feeling inside. While making my work for my thesis show, I began to see how empowering it was to make art about the diseases I suffered from and how relieving it was to release how I felt inside. I felt more peaceful and accepting of myself and who I was. I wasn’t ashamed of myself any more. Instead, I was relieved I finally could be myself through my art. My art ended up

educating me more than educating those around me. It taught me about myself and allowed me to express myself in a new and powerful way.

### **Art Therapy/Expressive Arts in Schools**

Texts in the realm of art therapy specifically talk about how art therapy and expressive arts have been successfully or unsuccessfully integrated into a school curriculum. The texts give different accounts of students using the expressive arts in school to help them perform better in the studies and also improve their self-esteem and attitude, such as in the article, *Using Play and Art Therapy to Help Culturally Diverse Students Overcome Barriers to School Success* (Cochran, 1996). In this article, Cochran observes that art can be one of the ways culturally diverse students can overcome cultural barriers and also help improve their performance in academics. Similar outcomes were also asserted in other studies as mentioned in the articles, *Keeping students in school: An art therapy program to benefit ninth-grade students* (McCulloch-Visliser, Neece, & Rosal, 1997), and *Reaching the tough adolescent through expressive arts therapy groups* (Moon, 2006). The texts in this category revealed how art can be used as a way for students to release feelings they were experiencing, feelings such as fear, anger, rage, confusion, and stress. The article *LA 94 Earthquake in the eyes of children: Art therapy with elementary school children who were victims of disaster* (Roje, 1995), discussed children from the ages of 4-11 who were diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder due to the Los Angeles earthquake in 1994. These students were encouraged to express their feelings and experiences related to the earthquake in words and pictures. Eventually, the students'

works began to display their fear and sadness that were a result of the tragic event. This study showed how expressive art activities helped students regain their inner sense of security while giving them an outlet to vent their stressful feelings.

### **Expressive Arts with Children and Adolescents**

In another group of texts, authors specifically talked about how art therapy and the expressive arts can be used to benefit both children and adolescents. These texts give useful examples of expressive art activities that can be done with children and adolescents. They inform us how the minds of children and adolescents work differently than adults and how we should approach the expressive arts differently with them. In the online article, *Expressive Art Projects*; Copeland (2011) gives multiple ideas for expressive arts projects that work for any age group, including adolescents and children. Copeland also offers ideas about designing art activities such as drawing with crayons, drawing to music, and a project she called “Desert Island Art Therapy.” This specific project is more for the teenage/adult age groups. The project consists of the student choosing 15 people who are important to him/her that he/she would take to a desert island. Then, the student makes an artwork to represent each of those 15 people (Copeland, 2011). The project helps the student analyze why each person is close to him/her. This project like many others lends itself to self-exploration and self-empowerment. On the same website, there are additional ideas for expressive art activities, including those offered by Lovingood (2011) in an article called *Creative and Expressive Arts Activities*, Lovingood describes activities such as mood painting, mask painting, expressive objects, and dot art. This group of texts was useful to my study in

helping me decide which expressive art activities would be most appropriate for my students.

### **Expressive Art Activities**

The final group of texts that I examined as part of my literature review for my study specifically talk about expressive art activities and offer ideas for their implementation in different settings such as a doctor's office, classroom, or hospital. One text I referred to in this group as aforementioned was Rebecca Plummer Rohloff's 2008 dissertation. In her dissertation, she suggests ideas for art educators to implement more creativity and expression into their art classrooms (Rohloff, 2008). Hers, along with other texts, offer specific project and activity ideas that have been previously tested and proved to be successful, such as in the book, *The Expressive Arts Activity Book: A Resource for Professionals* (Darley, Darley, & Heath, 2007). In this book, the authors give a collection of expressive arts activities such as individual card making, painting to music, body mapping using collage, and book assembling (Darley, Darley, & Heath, 2007). This book was useful in providing examples of expressive art activities that have been done before with varying ages (Darley, Darley, & Heath, 2007). Another text that was useful in helping me with ideas for my expressive arts activities was the book, *Art Therapy Activities: A Practical Guide for Teachers, Therapists, and Parents* (Stack, 2006). Stack (2006) wrote this book to help educators, therapists, and parents to encourage, stimulate, and facilitate creative expression to whomever they may come in contact with. In this book, Stack (2006) provides sample lesson plans and activities that could be useful to anyone teaching children how to express their feelings and thoughts through art. I found this book to be helpful for my study because it provided a guide on

how to become more organized when planning the expressive art activities that I would be implementing in my classroom for my study and in the future.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, all of these texts suggest that the arts can help students reflect on their personal lives, express their feelings and concerns, and quite possibly improve their self-esteem, behavior, and performance in school. The texts gave real life examples of how art has been used as a form of self-expression to help children better understand and cope the stresses and conditions of with their daily lives. I used these studies as a conceptual guide in my own thinking about how I might conduct similar studies within my own classroom.

Various professionals have utilized the expressive arts for many years to aid in the overall well-being and spirit of humankind. The expressive arts enable people to be more creative and in turn have the potential to boost self-esteem, personal expressiveness, and self-empowerment. The expressive arts could be extremely useful to our youth due to the unstable lives they lead today, and as they experience the various life changes of growing up. In this regard, the expressive arts could help students with stress, coping skills, self-esteem, and expressing their feelings properly.

I feel a need for more art educators to include expressive arts into their current art curricula in order to benefit the overall well being of their students. However, there is a lack of readily available resources for practicing art teachers to obtain well-researched methods and ideas regarding how they might create and integrate the expressive arts into their existing traditional curricula. In response to this problem, I have conducted

this study and have created a web site for teachers to reference for project ideas, examples. I also have created a blog for networking with other fellow art educators.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I will discuss the steps I took to create my Web-based resource and the methodology of my study. After designing and while implementing each expressive art activity with my students, I documented their artwork, had informal conversations with them in the classroom, and surveyed them for their opinions. Following each activity, I gathered and analyzed the data I collected from my surveys to group common answers together. After grouping the answers together, I calculated the percentages of their responses. This gave me a general sense of what they wrote in their journals, and let me know more about what they were thinking as these art projects unfolded. I then created a Web-based resource for art teachers to view my projects, findings, and images from the study.

### **Curriculum Research**

For the first step of my research, I researched studies or activities that have been conducted in the area of the expressive arts. I found a few studies and websites to inform my own expressive arts curriculum. After looking through these references, I created four expressive arts projects to integrate into my New Generation Florida Sunshine State Standards-based (SSS) art curriculum. These projects were: Self-Expressive Gestures, Cultural Project, Mood Painting to Music Project, and A Postcard to Never Send. Due to time constraints, I was only able to conduct an in depth study of two of the four projects. This is an ongoing curriculum and projects three and four are still unfolding as I prepare this research report.

The first project I conducted was the Mood Painting to Music Project, in which I played different four different types of music: Pop, Dubstep, Rock, and, Acoustic. This project asked students to make art without pre-planning or any specific purpose, similar to free association writing. The project also taught students a way to make art that is not necessarily representational. This type of art making can be covered under the Florida SSS for art curricula. For each Mood Painting project, I played one for each of the four genres of music and asked the students to make their marks or paint what they are feeling. Afterward, students were instructed to walk around and compare how the paintings of others compared to their own when listening to the same song. Students became more aware of the different ways people perceived and expressed each genre of music and how it affected each person differently (See Figures 3 and 4).



Figure 3: Age 14, Female, Tempera and Pastel, Mood Painting to Music Project-Song 1



Figure 4: Age 16, Male, Tempera and Pastel, Mood Painting to Music, Song 4

The second project, I presented was *The Postcard to Never Send*. In this project, students were instructed to make a postcard to send to someone that they have no contact with any longer or have an issue with. Students were told that they would not have to send this post card, but should be kept as a sort of diary piece. Students were encouraged to use images along with words for their postcard to describe how they felt toward the person or to tell them about something they have never told them. This postcard was intended to teach the students how art can be used as a communicator and can be used to express emotions that they may never have been able to verbalize before (see Figures 5 and 6).



Figure 5: Age 14, Colored Pencil, Postcard to Never Send



Figure 6: Age 17, Marker, Postcard to Never Send

The next project, *The Cultural Project*, was intended to teach students to explore their personal identity through investigating the different types of cultures they participate in such as: Teenage Culture, Pop Culture, and their Ethnic Culture. The project taught students self-exploration and to become more in touch of whom they are and what makes them unique. The project required students to create a self-portrait that portrayed their face, along with objects, symbols, and words that represented who they are and what cultures they are part of. With this, students also create a one-page paper explaining their cultures and their artwork.

This project helped my students explore and share who they are and how they can express themselves through the use of symbols. To help students, I created my own portrait (See Figure 7). In my piece, I used certain images and symbols to portray my Irish, Spanish, and American cultures. Through out my piece, I used sayings from the native Spanish and Celtic languages to display the languages of my cultures. I also used images of each country's flags to depict a visual symbol for each country. In addition, I used symbols to display major traditions, foods, and historical events of the cultures I am part of.

This project helps me get students to take a deeper look into the influences that affect their sense of self. After the completion of this project, many students made comments indication that they felt self-empowered and proud of whom they are.



Figure 7: Jennifer Mackey, “Cultural Self Portrait,” 14 X 16”, Watercolor Pencil

The last project, *Self-Expressive Gestures*, was intended to help the students explore the expressiveness of their mark making. Students were instructed to use their body movement, materials, and colors to make their artwork reflect their self-expression. Along with this project, students learned the importance of gestures and their purpose when trying to capture the movement of the human subject. In order to evaluate this activity, I observed the students’ body movements and mark making during this activity. I also encouraged students to stand, use a wide range of materials, and to make small and large marks when producing their artwork. I evaluated the

artwork not on how precise the human figure is, but based on how the marks that students made evoked a sense of the body or emotion of the model.

To begin this project, the students should be presented with a various amount of mark making materials such as paint, charcoal, pastel, marker, ink, chocolate syrup, coffee, etc., to make their marks with for the gestures. Second, the students were then encouraged to try different materials they may not used to and to not be afraid to change how they apply the materials (fingers, brush, tissue, directly from the bottle). I also encouraged the students to choose the material they felt would best meet their aims for this project. I let students know that I used pencil and watercolor for my project, because I felt these two materials appropriately met my aims. Third, the students were instructed to draw a gesture of a model (a class member), and with their materials express the emotion the model is conveying or how they feel personally when looking at the model. Students were told that the aim of this project is less about drawing a realistic human figure, but rather to capture emotions through the movement of their body and use of materials. Students were encouraged at this time to stand and use their body while making the gestures. Each gesture lasted no longer than 30 seconds. After the completion of the gestures, students then took a look at others gestures to compare their mark making to others in the class.

### **Surveys and Journals**

The second step of my research was the surveys and journals. After each project, I handed students an anonymous survey to fill out answers to the following questions:

- How do you feel before, during, and after making this piece?
  - What was the hardest part of this project and why?
  - Did this project make you feel better or worse about yourself?
  - If one thing could be improved on this project, what would it be and why?
  - What emotions did you feel while making this piece? (one word answers only)
- What do you feel you accomplished from making this piece?
- Overall, how did you like this project on a scale of 1-10? (1 being “extremely disliked” to 10 being “loved it.”)

After students answered their surveys, I asked them to write in their sketchbook/ journal any thoughts they had about that specific project.

Next, I analyzed the comments and answers from both their surveys and journals and grouped them into similar responses. After grouping them together, I calculated the percentage of students that answered similarly to each question. I then used these percentages to draw conclusions about which projects were most favored and most successful with my group of students.

### **Website**

The third part of my capstone project was the creation of my website for teachers, titled *Expressive Arts in School Art Curricula*. I built this site in order to showcase my approach to expressive arts making, and to educate and help other teachers who are interested in implementing the expressive arts into their curriculum. I posted my research and results from my study to the website to help validate this approach and to provide a guide for teachers get ideas about how they could possibly

implement the expressive arts into their existing curriculum. On the website, I included my purpose, a short biography about myself, an art gallery of expressive arts projects, lesson ideas, my results from my capstone research project, images from my reflective teaching journal, resources about expressive arts, and even a blog where teachers can share ideas and concerns.



Figure 8: Screen shot of Home page expressiveartsincurriculum.weebly.com

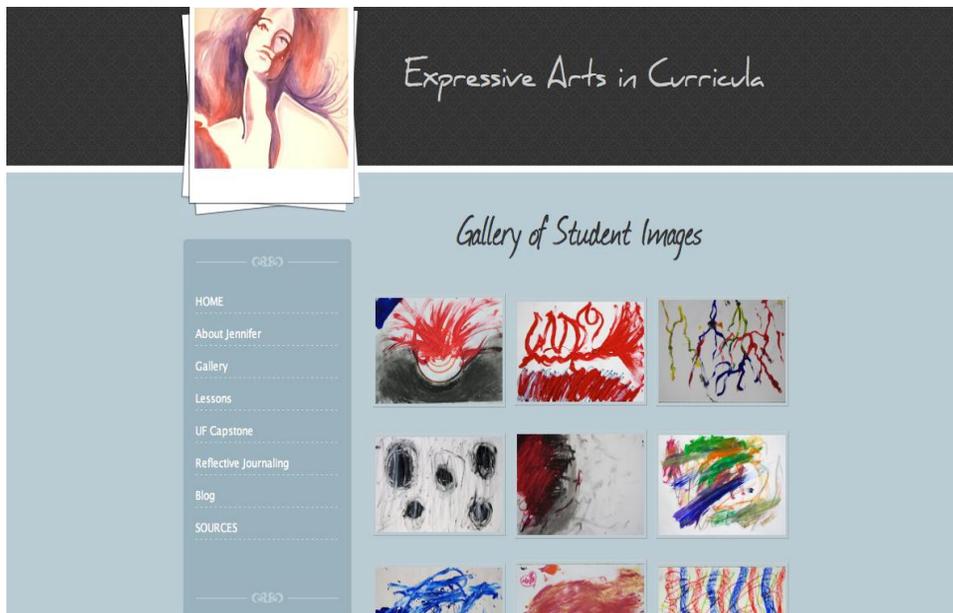


Figure 9: Screen shot of Gallery expressiveartsincurriculum.weebly.com

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

Over the course of four weeks, I conducted an in-depth study of two of the four expressive art activities that I had incorporated into in my 2-D Comprehensive I classroom, first period at Riverview High School in Riverview, Florida. After each activity I gave students a survey, asked them to journal their thoughts in their artist sketchbook journals, and photographed their work.

### **Mood Painting to Music**

The first activity, the “Mood Painting to Music” project, was conducted on March 2, 2012. For this activity, I came in early before class to set up all the supplies and materials needed, so when the students arrived, they would be ready to start. Once the students arrived, I explained to them that they would be making art to music and that they could use which ever materials they felt would best express their feelings from the song. Next, I told the students that the art they are making should take no pre-thought, but should be reactionary and compulsive by responding to what they were hearing in the music. Many students were confused on how to make this type of art because they were used making art that followed more prescribed lesson requirements, or that had to look realistic or resemble an actual object. I then instructed the students to stand up for this activity and grab the paper at the center of their desks. The first song I played was Linkin Park’s ”Don’t Stay.” This song is a rock song that has very heavy guitar, drums, and yelling voices within it. At first, many students didn’t know how to start or how to react to this type of music at 7:45 in the morning. After I encouraged them to not be afraid to go crazy, students began to pick up their materials and go for it! Some students still hesitated saying it was too early to be doing the activity or to be listening to rock. I

encouraged them telling them it would wake them up. Gradually all of the students began making marks, although some were more energetic than others. I kept reinforcing the idea to switch up materials and to not think so much about what they were doing. Rather, I told them to “just react to the music.” The students began to loosen up, and continued to become more expressive and making more marks, using their body as they made them. Some students began to use their fingers and hands to paint instead of their brushes, and some of them flung paint to create marks.

After I played the song for 2 minutes, I instructed the students to set their materials down and to grab a new sheet of paper for the next song. The next song I played was a pop song by Katy Perry, “Teenage Dream.” The students began their mark making once again. By this time, many of their demeanors had changed to be more relaxed and they were quicker to make their marks. They seemed to stop thinking about what things looked like, and just let their feelings and unconscious mind take over. Whereas initially I observed that many students were afraid to let go and be free because they were scared of what other people would think; by now, after students saw that there were other students having fun, being freely expressive, and “going crazy,” it was clear that the students stopped caring so much about what others thought and just finally let go. I believe that this activity liberated some of them in the process. As I changed to the next songs, Boyce Avenue’s remake of “Where is the love?” and Skrillex’s remake of Katy Perry’s, “E.T.,” the students progressively became more involved, expressive, energetic, and free as they made each new piece.

After the 4 songs were played for 2 minutes each, I instructed the students to place their pieces together by song in different part of the room. I then told them to

compare theirs to others in the class and to look at how each student expressed the same song differently. Many students commented on how “cool,” some were and really enjoyed looking to see that their artwork wasn’t as bad as they initially thought. After, I told the students to take a seat and I was going to give them a survey on the activity they had just participated in. During the activity, they thought that this project was a “normal” project. By telling them afterwards that this was also part of my study, I feel this helped create less bias with my findings because the students did not know they were doing this for my study. (It is important to keep in mind that all of these students and their parents had already agreed to be study participants in my expressive arts study.) I gave the students a general survey that asked for their age, gender, and grade level, and that asked them to respond to the following questions:

1. How did you feel before making this artwork?
2. How did you feel during the making of this artwork?
3. How do you feel after making this artwork?
4. Did this project make you feel better or worse about yourself or neither?
5. If one thing could be improved about this activity/ project, what would it be and why?
6. What emotions did you feel while making this piece? (one word answers only)  
What do you feel you accomplished by making this artwork?
7. Over all how would you rate this project? (1 being “extremely disliked” to 10 being “loved it.”)

After gathering the surveys, I thanked the students for their participation and many came up to me after giving me their extra comments and questions. Some I

received were: “Can we do this again/more? Can we do this every day to wake up? Can we do this for now on every Monday?” Many students seemed eager to do it again and seemed to like the activity. From the surveys I gave out, I found many interesting comments, thoughts, and suggestions that I feel were very informative for both my study and if I plan to do this art activity again in the future. Here are some of my findings from the surveys.

From the survey, I found I had only 18 participants due to absences. Of the 18, 5 were 14 years old, 6 were 15 years old, 2 were 16 years old, 4 were 17 years old, and 1 was 19 years old. Of the 18 students, 13 were female and 5 were male. The grade distribution of the students were” 7 in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 6 in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 3 in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and 2 in 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

I then grouped each question’s responses into multiple categories by similar answers. Here are my findings:

**Question 1: How did you feel before making this artwork?**

- Anxious (2)
- Bored (3)
- Tired (5)
- Excited (4)
- Confused (4)

**Question 2: How did you feel during the making of this artwork?**

- Energetic (5)
- Free (3)
- Fun (5)
- Mellow (1)
- Creative (2)

Some interesting responses were:

“I felt like a little kid.”

“First I felt tormented, second in love, third at peace, and fourth up beat.”

**Question 3: How do you feel after making this artwork?**

Awake (4)

Free (2)

Proud (1)

Happy (3)

Less Stressed (2)

Accomplished (1)

Confident (1)

Refreshed (1)

Awesome (1)

Relaxed (1)

Frustrated (1)

**Question 4: Did this project make you feel better or worse about yourself or neither?**

Better (9)

Worse (0)

Neither (9)

**Question 5: If one thing could be improved about this activity/ project, what would it be and why?**

Improve music variety (2)

Improve nothing (2)

Play songs longer (4)

More colors/more materials (6)

More of mood painting in class (2)

More space (1)

**Question 6: What emotions did you feel while making this piece? (one-word answers only) What do you feel you accomplished by making this artwork? (This question had multiple responses per student)**

Angry (6)  
Sad (2)  
Happy (10)  
Relaxed (2)  
Confident (1)  
Nothing (3)  
Crazy (1)  
Accomplished (1)  
Relieved (1)  
Creative (1)  
Relieved anxiety (1)  
Random (1)  
Excited (4)  
Energized (1)  
Expressed feelings (1)  
Insane (1)

Some interesting responses were:

“My heartbroken piece described my life.”

“I felt heartbroken, mad, and excited.”

“ I now know that I can do quick paintings that look awesome.”

“ I felt free and spaced out.”

**Question 7: Over all how would you rate this project? (1 being “extremely disliked” to 10 being “loved it.”)**

6 Rating (2)  
7 Rating (2)  
8 Rating (2)  
9 Rating (2)  
10 Rating (10)

From these findings, I came to the following conclusions about this activity. One, from observing my students actions and emotions, I see that my study reiterates the fact that our students are everywhere on the emotional map. Everyday as educators we deal

with our students' *rollercoaster of emotions* and often don't know what is going on in their heads. This project just shows from the various responses given in the survey that our students lead complex and difficult lives. Knowing this information helps both me and other educators know their students better and it reinforces the need for us to formulate a curriculum that helps students deal with their emotions. An expressive arts curriculum may not alleviate all of these emotions for these students, but it can help them express their feelings and needs in a healthy way. The results from this activity made me see that this type of expressive art activity was successful with my students through their level of engagement with the activity, their appreciation of both the processes and the artworks produced, and their requests to do this again. My students' actions and comments make me realize that they would like to see more expressive art activities in my curriculum.

From my students' comments, I also see areas I can improve the next time we perform this activity. First, I need to allow for more time per song for students to express themselves. Second, I need to have a wider variety of music, perhaps instead of just four songs, have six-to-eight songs from different genres of music to give students more variety. Third, I need to provide a wider variety of expressive art materials, and more colors, so students can have more options for materials they choose to express their emotions. (See Figures 10, 11, 12, and 13.)



Figure 10: Age 19, Female, Marker and Tempera, Mood Painting to Music- Song 1



Figure 11: Age 17, Female, Pastel and Tempera, Mood Painting to Music-  
Song 2



Figure 12: Age 14, Female, Tempera and Pastel, Mood Painting to Music-Song 3



Figure 13: Age 14, Female, Tempera, Mood Painting to Music- Song 4

## **A Postcard to Never Send**

The second activity, *A Postcard to Never Send*, was conducted on March 5, 2012. With this activity, I prepared by cutting card stock into 3.5 X 5.5 inch rectangles. On the rectangles, I drew a line down one side through the middle and added the word, "To", to make it appear to be formatted like a postcard. I then handed out the postcards to the students and asked them to think of a person that they may not communicate with due to the inability to express their feelings toward that person. The person could be living or dead, or someone they no longer have contact with. I told them, "What would you want to say to this person if you could see them or have the guts to talk to them?" I then told students that the postcard I handed them was to be addressed towards that person, yet they are never going to send it. I told them to tell them through their art how they feel for them, either good or bad. I also instructed students that if they would like to, they could write a message to the person on the back of the postcard. The students overall seemed to have an easy time deciding who they were going to address their postcard to. A few struggled, however, so I asked them more questions to help them try to find someone they may not have got along with, or that they forgot about. After asking questions like, "Did you ever hate a kid in school when you were little? Did you ever not get along with your parents, coach, or a teacher? Have you ever had a crush?" Usually, after I asked them these questions, they could think of one person they wanted to tell something to.

After giving them the instructions, I gave them two days to decorate their card and return it to me. Many of the students failed to turn in their cards to me because they lost it or forgot to turn it in. I encouraged students to turn the cards in if they had them,

but did not press the issue. Thus, only 13 students ended up participating in this project. Yet, the 13 postcards returned were not only meaningful, but also beautiful. Many of the postcards had a theme of broken hearts or were about love and heartache. Other postcards were about estranged friendships, someone dying who was close to them, or someone they have not been able to tell something that has bothered them for a while. Some of the cards stuck out more than others either by their artwork or message. First, there was a male student who decorated his card with his face and hearts in his eyes (Figure 13). Then on the back of the card he wrote a short poem to his “crush” (Figure 14). Little did I know his crush is a girl he sits across from in my classroom. I never would have guessed he had a crush on this girl.



Figure 14: Age 14, Male, Colored Pencil and Ink, A Postcard to Never Send (Front)

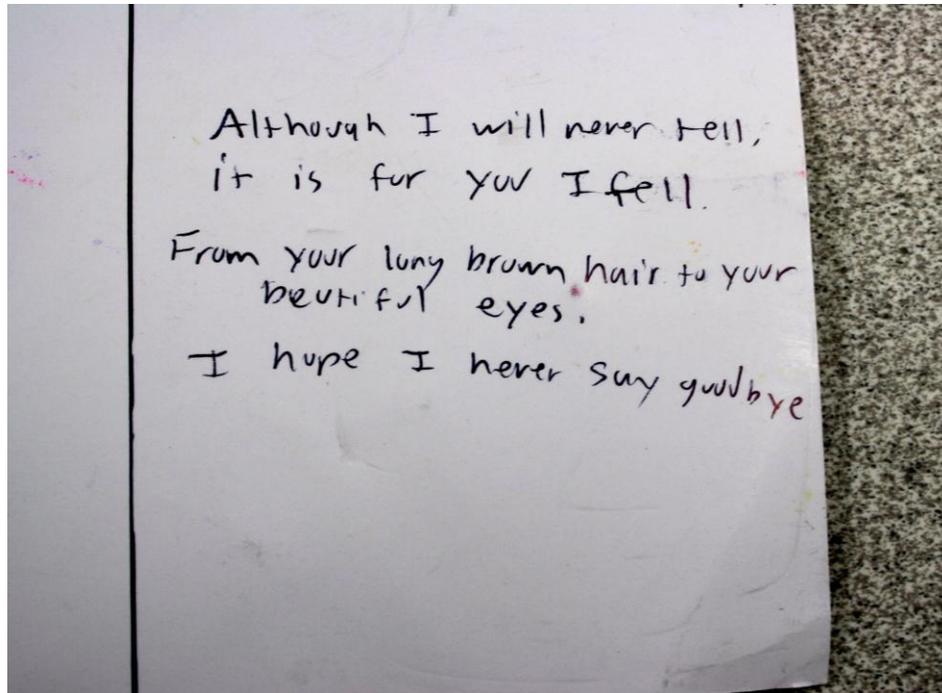


Figure 15: Age 14, Male, Colored Pencil and Ink, A Postcard to Never Send (Back)

The next postcard that struck me was a postcard by a 17-year-old female in my class (Figure 15). The postcard depicts a landscape with a broken heart in a tree and on the ground. The card also depicts balloons going into the sky with two crosses on the ground below. The picture is confusing and her message confuses me more. The message is filled with a kind of sadness and you can tell the postcard is addressed to someone she can no longer talk to either by death or by distance. You can infer from the message on the back and her image, that this may have been the place she last talked to this person. (Figure 16).



Figure 16: Age 17, Female, Marker, A Postcard to Never Send (front)

I just want to let you know, I got those balloons for you. I hope that where ever you are, I miss you. I saw your mom a while ago, she misses you, too. Derek also. She loves you guys, Always had. I hope you and Derek are happy. I also want to let you know that I'm so thankful that I had you in my life. You saved me and I wish I could've done the same for you. You were the truest friend I've ever had. Without you I feel lonely and scared, but as long as have the Memories, I'll be okay. I Love You.

Figure 17: Age 17, Female, Marker, A Postcard to Never Send (back)

The results from the study also suggested even more interesting results, along with other postcards that were meaningful and touching to me. As with the first project, I gave students the same survey to fill out with the same questions. In this study, because of absences and students failing to give me their postcard, I only had 13 students return their postcards to me. I feel that some said they forgot their postcard, but really this project may have been too difficult for them to face emotionally or they were scared to share what they made with me. The survey results were as follows:

**Question 1: How did you feel before making this artwork?**

Confused (2)  
Normal (3)  
Nervous (1)  
Good (2)  
Confident (1)  
Curious (1)  
Excited (1)  
Undecided (1)  
Angry (1)

**Question 2: How did you feel during the making of this artwork?**

Happy (3)  
Sad (1)  
Thoughtful (1)  
Lame (1)  
Creative (1)  
Angry (2)  
Neutral (1)

Some interesting responses were:

“ I could have done better.”

“In the zone.”

**Question 3: How do you feel after making this artwork?**

Nervous (1)  
Good (1)  
Disappointed (1)  
Relieved (1)  
Same (2)  
Calmer (1)  
Neutral (1)

Some interesting responses were:

“Looking at the final artwork, I still felt sad, but also glad that my feelings were now out on paper.”

“Wonderful, Hope she doesn’t get the card.”

“Sad that I had to give it up.”

“Happy and Proud.”

**Question 4: Did this project make you feel better or worse about yourself or neither?**

Better (5)  
Worse (0)  
Neither (6)

Some interesting responses were:

“It made me feel better about myself because it made me realize how much I miss my Great Grandma. I think that’s better than locking your feelings away.”

“It reminded me of a painful time.”

**Question 5: If one thing could be improved about this activity/ project, what would it be and why?**

Broader theme (1)  
Nothing (6)  
Make more than one (1)  
More time (1)

Some interesting responses were:

“It’s great as it is, maybe more things to do in the postcard.”

“Letting us make one we want to send.”

“Give it to an actual person, it would be fun to see what people would do, especially if they don’t know who it is from.”

**Question 6: What emotions did you feel while making this piece? (one-word answers only) What do you feel you accomplished by making this artwork? (This question had multiple responses per student)**

Happy (2)

Confused (2)

Conflicting Feelings (2)

Sad (2)

Ok (1)

Lazy (1)

Accomplished nothing (1)

Regret (1)

Relieved my emotions (1)

Thankful (1)

Lost (1)

Love (1)

Embarrassed (1)

Frustrated (2)

Hurt (1)

Neutral (2)

Angry (1)

Some interesting comments were:

“I accomplished expressing my feelings.”

“ I accomplished opening up my emotions instead of keeping them inside.”

“I accomplished making the person I like happy along with myself.”

“ I accomplished conveying my emotions properly.”

**Question 7: Over all how would you rate this project? (1 being “extremely disliked” to 10 being “loved it.”)**

- 4 Rating (1)
- 5 Rating (1)
- 6 Rating (2)
- 7 Rating (2)
- 8 Rating (2)
- 9 Rating (2)
- 10 Rating (3)

Using the results of this activity and watching the students perform the activity, I made the following observations about this project. First, I see that many students have a range of emotions coming into the activity just like the last activity they performed. Second, I see that students either felt upset or happy when they were done making the postcard. These emotions I could directly correlate to the postcard they made. The third observation I made is that many students realized the benefits of this project without myself telling them. They realized this activity helped them express their emotions more effectively and helped them not keep them bottled up inside.

With these observations, I conclude that overall the students benefited from and enjoyed this project. Some may have rated the activity with a low score because they were sad from the making of the card. Yet, in the long run, I believe that they will look back at the activity and see that it actually benefited them emotionally. Bad memories and feelings are tough to deal with, but the more we keep them inside and don't express them, the worse they can get. I hope that both of these projects showed students a healthy, artistic way to express their emotions. I plan to continue my studies in the future with the expressive arts and hope to implement these and future projects into my current SSS-based art curriculum.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Conclusions**

After conducting this study, I have come to many conclusions about the expressive arts and their part in a school arts curriculum. I believe this study suggests that the expressive arts do facilitate students' self-expression and personal growth. Based on my findings, I also believe that students of any background or age benefit from expressive arts activities in their lives. Every child has their own unique life experience and issues they bring with them to school, including problems at home, school, or with a relationship they are in. Scholars and educators have found the expressive arts to only be beneficial for people who have been through a traumatic event, but expressive arts are also beneficial for helping people with everyday issues they face in their daily lives. With these goals in mind, I maintain here that it is our job as art educators to introduce our students to the expressive arts, and how expressive arts can be used as a tool to improve student quality of life. Through expressive arts projects, we can help our students reflect on and possibly even share their feelings instead of bottling them up.

We as teachers can also benefit from the implementation and use of the expressive arts. I experienced this personally by recognizing my outlook on the expressive and abstract arts had changed after the completion of my study. Before, I looked negatively toward abstract/expressive art and didn't understand it. I felt it was a senseless art that took no talent or had no purpose. After seeing the power of the expressive arts and the effect it had on my students, I realized that the expressive and

abstract arts had a greater purpose. They aren't about being beautiful or representational, but more about the experience while making them. There's a self-empowerment gained through the process of making, which makes them more important than I ever imagined. From these revelations, I also saw a change in how I taught my students. No longer was I as rigid with my students, expecting their art to be realistic and perfect. I became more accepting of their artwork's imperfections and was more open to them taking different paths on their projects instead of always following the rules. I let them be freer, and in turn freed myself as well.

This isn't the only time I have felt the power of the expressive arts. At the age of 23, I became anorexic and bulimic, and was considered a severe case, so severe that I lost 25 pounds in 3 months to weigh 81 pounds before I sought treatment. After treatment, I was scared, confused, and had many emotions running through my head that I had once numbed by being anorexic and bulimic. I realized I now had to deal with these feelings and didn't know how to express them all verbally. So, I turned to art to become my voice and tool for dealing with my emotions. I then realized the healing power that art brought me, helping me cope with my diseases. Expressive art making helped me understand and accept my feelings, and to express them instead of repressing them. Expressive art making also helped me to share my story with others, and I believe that in this sharing I also helped others who may be suffering from the same or other illnesses. As a result of my healing, facilitated in part through expressive art making, I decided to do my senior thesis art project/show for my Bachelors degree on the subject of anorexia and bulimia (Figure 17). At the show, watching people's reactions and talking to them actually helped me heal even more. I finally was able to



students from acting out in other ways in the future. I can only hope that their knowing that there are other ways to express one's experiences, problems, and feelings of failure that drinking, drugs, smoking, crime, and suicide. This research project, interwoven with my own story, encapsulates how my passion for the expressive arts developed. With this study, I continue to pursue my passion to teach and touch others lives through the power of the expressive arts.

### **Implications**

With this study and the results from the two expressive arts activities that I examine more closely in this capstone project, it is evident that the students benefited from these activities. Students were able to improve in the expression of their emotions, their self-esteem was enhanced in positive ways, and they began to see art making as a form of self-empowerment. My examination of students' art projects and responses also suggests that that the activities they performed, they actually enjoyed. Many students came to me after the projects concluded; asking when could do it again. The students felt like they were finally able to be free to express their emotions and not have anyone judge them for it. So it is clear that the expressive art activities helped these students release their emotions, improve their attitude, and be more attentive and productive in the classroom. I believe that these benefits can also flow over into other classes and into their lives outside of school. My hope with this study is that other art teachers see the benefits of expressive arts activities, and that they work toward including expressive arts in their own curricula.

## **Recommendations**

For any teacher looking to implement the expressive arts into their curriculum, I offer the following advice. One, start small and then go big; meaning, I would pick a couple expressive arts activities to implement into the curriculum and then grow from there. Too many activities in one semester/year may overwhelm the students or you. Try one or two and see how it goes. If the kids react well, then add in more gradually. In addition, I would try to integrate the expressive art activities into your already existing curriculum. This way, you are covering the standards and requirements of your school and state, and at the same time, also allowing your students to express themselves. Next, I would ask for and then take some of your students' opinions into consideration regarding the kinds of expressive art activities they would most appreciate. Why do an activity if they don't like it? You can't force them to like something. Instead, ask for their input and make changes to your curriculum plans where you see fit.

Last, I suggest you have fun too. I suggest that not only should you teach the expressive arts, but that you should practice them yourself too. You will never know the true power of the expressive arts until you try them yourself. I think you will be pleasantly surprised once you try it. As you know, being a teacher isn't that easy. Yet, with the use of the expressive arts in our lives, it may make our jobs feel a little less stressful and emotionally exhausting. In other words, we can benefit from the expressive arts just as much as our students can, so try it!

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jennifer Costello Mackey's began her studies as a fine artist at the University of South Florida in 2002. After 6 years, she completed her B.F.A in studio art with a minor in art history, May of 2008. Soon after, she became a high school art teacher in the Fall of 2008. After teaching for 2 years, she decided to further her education and chose the University of Florida for her Masters degree.

Jennifer will graduate May of 2012 and hopes to become a professor at a local college or university one day. Currently, Jennifer teaches high school art at Riverview High School in Riverview, Florida. Her current research involves the integration of the expressive arts in a traditional arts classroom.