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Creativity in a Post-Traumatic Mind

By

Kay Waterson

A thesis submitted to the faculty at Kendall College of Art and Design of Ferris State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art

Education in the Art Education Program.

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The human brain is a complex system, which requires multiple moving parts to operate in conjunction with one another in order to produce healthy cognitive processes. This thesis is meant to examine the impact of trauma in an educational context and will present findings in current psychological research about the role that creativity plays in the process of neurological healing and cognitive functioning. To understand the basis for my argument it is important to establish that the subjects of discussion are public school students K-12 with experiences and histories of trauma. The role of creativity will be explored within the context of formal visual art education using results from research in the fields of psychology and art therapy to validate suggested trauma-informed practices to be used in the art classroom by certified educators. Further, this thesis will challenge readers to consider what impact the increased frequency of disaster in our nation may have on our student population, and how the role of art education may evolve to address this problem. What can educators do to become more knowledgeable about trauma and trauma-informed teaching practices and in what ways could the traditional art classroom be re-imagined to combat the negative effects that trauma has on a students' ability to learn? To begin to understand this problem, it is essential to both evaluate the prevalence of traumatic events in our students' lives and understand the internal functioning and benefits of the process of creativity in a post-traumatic mind.

A History of Trauma in Education

The landscape of education in America is notorious for shifting against the weight of current demands. School policies and teaching trends can sometimes be influenced by changes in the needs of our student population. Current events can impact the systems that schools have in place for safety, health, or behavior management. It is worth considering how our student population may be experiencing disruption from an increased frequency in disaster such as mass gun violence, poverty, family separation, and displacement from natural disaster events. Humanitarian crises of many different forms are becoming more frequent, yet only two percent of humanitarian funding is dedicated to education (Halman, Fliert, Khan, & Shevellar, 2018). Part of the agenda of education should be designed as a response to these trauma-inducing crises, which are becoming more increasingly common. Education offers numerous benefits beyond basic learning (shelter, adult care and affection, food, play), and it's because of this that classrooms can function as being crucial to relieving trauma (Halman et al., 2018). To change with the times could mean that it is time for schools to consider the urgency and profound impact that trauma can have on the cognitive processes that are essential to learning. The issue of trauma in the classroom may become more and more complicated as the frequency of public crises increases. Trauma-informed practices have become more recognized, especially in inner-city school settings where as many as one-third of children living in our country's urban neighborhoods have PTSD at nearly twice the rate reported for troops returning from war zones in Iraq (Hammond, 2015, p.33).

Creating a design for trauma sensitive classroom cultures and environments should be a priority for schools that serve in these communities. In order to provide a truly equitable education to all students means servicing a body of students appropriately and in consideration of

their histories and experiences of trauma. It is up to teachers and administrators to consider which interventions and programs are best suited to address trauma in light of the current state of trauma inducing national events. Historically, social and emotional learning and trauma-informed practices have not been understood as vital priorities during instruction. Many of the commonly accepted strategies for disciplining students are not trauma sensitive and can escalate behavior or power struggles. Trauma is something that educators should be more aware of when considering classroom cultures and social and emotional learning. This is because students can learn more successfully when they feel a sense of safety and belonging. When we look at how prevalent trauma is in our society we should also be questioning how prevalent trauma is in our classrooms. One third of the current adult population has in their lifetime experienced significant adverse traumatic events that have altered their behaviors in some way (Malchiodi, 2015). Providing an equitable education should mean addressing the basic needs of our students especially in light of the implications of trauma. Our society as a whole can benefit from the explicit teaching of empathy and from early interventions in social and emotional learning.

Trauma and Learning

There are many reasons why trauma creates problems not only in our classrooms but in our larger society as well. Perhaps the most consequential of these problems is the direct effect that trauma has on an individual's cognitive development, emotional development, and ability to learn. It is important for education workers to become informed about these devastating consequences. The American Psychiatric Association defines Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) as lasting substantial effects on a person's psychosocial and somatic functioning that occurs from a single

traumatizing event, or reoccurring exposure to neglect or abuse (Malchiodi, 2015). These specific effects include the following behaviors.

Hyper-arousal manifests in students as irritability, dissociation, or angry outbursts that can be triggered by exposure to something that resembles some aspect of the traumatic event (for example being asked to create a card for Father's Day if a student has experienced the loss of a parent). Re-experiencing is an effect that can be caused by reminders or anniversaries of the traumatic event and can lead to children feeling like the event is recurring in the present. This leads to nightmares, chronic stress, intrusive or compulsive thoughts, and unpredictable behaviors. Avoidance in the classroom sometimes looks like a student behaving defiantly or choosing to stay off-task. A foreshortened sense of the future is another element of this effect. It is often difficult to redirect the behaviors of students experiencing avoidance because they do not fully understand the way that their actions now will affect them in the future. Students may not show interest in engaging in activities that they once enjoyed, because they subconsciously may believe that avoiding their work or adult and peer interactions will somehow allow them to avoid situations that evoke the memory of a traumatic event. Developmental Problems are an additional challenge. Traumatized students may have a heightened sense of self-blame or stunted autonomy due to the internalization of what they perceived causes their own victimization, for example "this happened to me because I did something wrong." Attachment disorders can develop as a result of a traumatizing event between a child and a caregiver. Emotional and cognitive delays can also occur as developmental problems (Malchiodi, 2015).

Imagine our students' brains as having three basic parts: the brain stem, the limbic system, and the frontal cortex. Each of these sections of the brain over time has evolved to serve a specific purpose in human survival. The brain's prefrontal lobes of the cortex are the epicenter

for our highest regulatory skills. This is the part of the brain where planning, communication, emotional regulation, and critical thinking occur. This is also the part of the brain that is active when we are at our most executive and effective emotional and cognitive functioning, the ideal “learning state”.

The brain stem is, evolutionarily speaking, the most primitive section of our brain. The brainstem and cerebellum are responsible for managing motor skills, reflexes, and the cardiovascular system. The limbic system consists of the amygdala, hippocampus, and the hypothalamus. The purpose of these systems is self-preservation. The limbic system is where implicit memory (recalling of sensory and emotional experiences) occurs. Trauma specialists believe that the limbic system is where trauma reactions take place (Malchiodi, 2015). During a moment or memory of a distressing event the amygdala triggers a physiological response that could be considered a “survival mode” where students subconsciously generate a fight, flight, or freeze response (Bailey, 2014). Part of understanding our traumatized students is understanding that these behaviors, although unproductive and often disruptive, are not a conscious choice, but rather an internal defense mechanism that is activated with the intentions of self-preservation during a moment of distress or over-stimulation.

PTSD affects an individual’s memory functioning as well. When a trauma reaction is occurring, our students cannot access their explicit memories (recalling of facts, concepts, and ideas). Their amygdala’s defensive mechanisms keep them from being able to consciously regulate, rationalize, or consider multiple points of view. In other words, their limbic system takes over and their prefrontal lobes are not accessible until the student’s brain lowers its defenses and can understand that there is no threat. If students do not feel safe, they do not have

access to recalling their previous learning and they are unable to process and store new learning within their explicit and long-term memories.

Another important part of the brain to understand is Broca's area, which is located in the lower left frontal lobe. Broca's area is the section of the brain that controls language and verbalization. It is very connected to an individual's explicit memories and research among children with PTSD has discovered that survivors of trauma experience incredible developmental delays within Broca's area (Malchiodi, 2015). This means that our traumatized students significantly struggle to verbalize, and express their own trauma narratives in written form. This is a huge problem for students who are unable to talk about or process what they need from caregivers, therapists, and teachers in order to build resilience and begin their neurological process of healing. It has been observed during clinical trials that when an individual is asked to remember or begin to speak about a traumatic event, the Broca's area shuts down. This barrier against verbalization is the limbic system's attempt at protecting an individual from reexperiencing an extremely painful situation during recall. This is where artistic and creative processes become an invaluable strategy for supporting our students as they seek out non-verbal, non-linguistic methods of processing their trauma narratives and begin their paths towards building resiliency.

Trauma and Art Education

Art making can be a joyful hobby, an intriguing area of study, and a rewarding career, but what are the neurological benefits of creative activity and how might the role of art in education shift to serve a greater purpose? The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) sponsored a longitudinal study that discovered among students from families with low socioeconomic status, those that participated in arts courses achieved higher test scores, higher graduation rates, and

higher school GPAs than students who were not engaged in the arts (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2016). It was also discovered from a study through Drexel University that after just 45 minutes of art making, subjects' stress levels lowered significantly. Stress levels were measured before and after the 45-minute creative period and the subjects' levels of the stress hormone cortisol were shown to measure significantly lower after the art making sessions. The subjects who were the most affected by the creative sessions were young children and teenagers (Drexel University, 2016). From these studies we can conclude that the arts do have a measurable impact on the academic success of our students, but let's look closely at the specific relationship between the arts and our students with trauma.

Although educators in every content area encounter students with trauma, art educators have a unique perspective and insight into students' emotional and mental states. Visual art curriculum is designed to integrate instruction of material processes, art history, meaning making, and social and emotional content. For instance during a high quality art classroom critique students are expected to conduct an analysis of a work of art by considering the original artist's perspective, experiences, and message. This activity cultivates higher level thinking skills along with problem solving skills. Through a rigorous process of critique and revision, students can develop their own mastery and fluency of material use to understand and communicate their own experiences and opinions. In young children, playful material activities and lessons in conjunction with positive adult relationships can offer safe opportunities to expressively communicate ideas that they may be unable to speak or write. Establishing a safe and supportive classroom culture can help students with trauma to find ways to process and reprocess troubling memories during sensory experiences with art materials. Creative art lessons naturally offer a structured space for self-empowerment and introspection to occur. When designed intentionally

and with attention to trauma sensitivity, creative art learning experiences can introduce students to strategies for enhancing resiliency. Through these experiences students can develop feelings of power and capability over the traumatic events that have disrupted their lives. These self-generated feelings of power can be invaluable to our students with trauma, and can lead to a growth mindset and ownership in their own process of recovery (Malchiodi, 2015).

Studies in the field of neuroscience have revealed that creative activity in the brain can diminish effects of trauma by creating a corrective experience and can alleviate symptoms of trauma such as depression and severe anxiety (Perryman, Blisard, & Moss, 2019). Neuroscience as an area of study and practice can be immeasurably beneficial to learning about the connections between art and creative processes and trauma-related healing and repair.

In the teaching profession misconceptions about the brain still exist. Recent studies report that over 70 percent of classroom teachers believe students to be exclusively either right-brained, or left-brained (Posey, 2019). Although different students may favor learning activities that engage the different hemispheres, it is important to understand this misconception. According to Posey (2019), “The brain is never active in just an isolated region or hemisphere. Instead in any moment a multitude of brain circuits are active in an interconnected symphony of exchange” (p.52). It is imperative for educators to understand the cognitive functioning of the human brain in order to service students with trauma in a way that is knowledgeable and equitable.

The brain’s plasticity plays a role in resiliency. Neural pathways can be re-created as individuals begin learning how to understand their trauma narratives and begin exploring creative coping strategies (Perryman et al., 2019). Neuroscientific technologies like MRIs (magnetic resonance imaging) can measure the stimulation and engagement within the brain before and after creative art experiences to show correlations between the areas affected by

trauma and the areas affected by creative processes while EEGs (Electroencephalograms) can measure brain wave activity during creative art experiences and can offer concrete images of where in the brain's hemispheres the action is occurring. What we have been shown through the use of these technologies is that traumatic events impair many areas of the left hemisphere of our brains, meaning that our traumatized students are right brain dominant. This is significant in the field of art education because not only is the right hemisphere of the brain the emotional center of the brain but it is also primarily where our abstract thinking and meaning-making occur (Perryman et al., 2019). This means that when traumatized individuals engage in creative processes such as drawing or painting, they are stimulating their emotional centers and bridging neural connectivity that creates new pathways within their underdeveloped left hemispheres, building resiliency. Neuroscience research has also revealed that dormant memories, emotions, and sensations can be elicited from the temporal lobes through the process of art making (Perryman et al., 2019).

Art Educators as First Responders to Trauma

The term "first responders" is often associated with those working in the fields of police, fire-fighting, and emergency medical services. Teachers are not often given the credit of working directly to impact the public in ways that are life altering. Teachers should be given recognition for being directly immersed in and involved with the lives of so many who are in need of care and support. The role of mandated reporters is to understand the warning signs and to formally document and report any gross variation of the norm. Typically, school districts will work with Child Protective Services to investigate suspected neglect or abuse cases. Sometimes, however, trauma or abuse is hard to detect because it does not have a visual indicator such as a bruised eye

or a cigarette burn. This is where art educators can serve a vital role as first responders to students with trauma.

To better illustrate this idea, take these examples from a real experience with a student in the art classroom. I was teaching a design lesson to my second graders and one of the lesson objectives was to identify and cut out product advertisements from a selection of home and gardening themed magazines. One student, who I'll identify using the pseudonym "M", began seeking and intentionally cutting out the pelvic areas from all of the photographs of females in the advertisements. I had been working with M since kindergarten and knew that she was a selective mute who chose to talk only when there was a basic need to be met and answered using one-word sentences. She glued the images onto a paper and signaled for a check-in by raising her hand. Although she was unwilling to speak about the decisions that she made within her artwork, this was a red flag for me because it was a gross variation of the norm (artwork that is developmentally unusual or concerning in nature). In earlier artwork from the previous year, she had created a self-portrait with superpowers. During this lesson, first grade students had studied the concept of character traits in art and literature, self-identified with a trait, and illustrated self-portraits with their character trait superpowers. M had chosen the character trait "strong." She had illustrated a portrait of herself in fancy shoes with a cape and several long spikes protruding from her body. I rotated around the room to interview students about why they had chosen their trait and how they had decided to depict that superpower in their portraits. On an index card, I would scribe for the first graders as they verbally answered my questions during our interview. When I came to M I asked her, "How does your superpower help you to be strong?" She responded quietly "I have spikes. Nobody can touch me." This drawing alone did not warrant a CPS call, but paired with the collage evidence from her second grade artwork and with

documented variations of the norm collected by M's classroom teachers and social workers it would have been enough evidence to begin an abuse investigation.

As art educators we have to understand the appropriate protocol for mandated reporting. When we uncover what we believe to be a variation of the norm in our classrooms it is imperative that we always document the date and meet with building administrators to share our insights and documentation. In M's case CPS did not believe that there were grounds for an investigation and the case was inconclusive, but we are all working hard to support her and to continue documenting anything that could be legally useful in advocating for her well being. Navigating these systems can be frustrating for teachers. In my experience more could and should be done, but as a single educator I was not able to cultivate enough convincing evidence to change M's situation at home. What I do have control over, however, is how I am implementing trauma-informed practices into my own classroom and how I continue to show up for M and offer creative art experiences for her to process her thoughts, emotions, and experiences visually. For students with trauma like M, creating art is a non-threatening outlet for managing emotions, processing inner feelings about victimization, and learning coping strategies (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2016).

Creative Interventions in Clinical Art Therapy

In the mental health profession art therapy is used to improve the health of individuals through the treatment of a wide range of mental disorders and psychological distress (Dilawari & Tripathi, 2014). Creative intervention is a practice, which is used primarily in the field of art therapy. The goals and intended outcomes for these types of interventions when working with clients with PTSD are to build positive functioning among family and other prosocial behaviors, develop healthy self-regulation, problem solving skills, and resiliency. The outcomes can be

achieved after multiple sessions with a trusted adult. During a clinical creative intervention session a professional would facilitate a creative activity using art materials and processes to guide a client to create a representation of his or her traumatic experiences. The facilitator would then guide the client during an intervention to discover and process their feelings associated with their traumatic experiences. This practice has been shown to assist young clients in gaining more control over their responses (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2016).

Another important finding in the field of art therapy is the role of sensory processing. When children work through visual, tactile, olfactory (smell), auditory, or vestibular (balance) sensory experiences with materials, it can serve as a catalyst to explore and help externalize trauma narratives. During trauma intervention externalization is considered a central part of the relief and recovery process. Externalization is the process of manifesting troubling thoughts, experiences, and feelings in a form outside of the body (this could be with writing, speaking, music, dance, or art). It is believed by many trauma experts that the use of the arts in counseling can speed up a patient's externalization processes (Malchiodi, 2015).

Creative Interventions in Public Art Education

After looking at creative interventions, it is important to recognize and distinguish between what is appropriate for licensed clinical practitioners to use versus what is appropriate for certified educators to use. Art educators may be unqualified to provide direct counseling for trauma, yet we are tasked with teaching student populations that often have PTSD or trauma-related mental illnesses. What follows is a collection of suggested trauma-informed practices that art educators can and should use in their own classrooms.

Relationships

It is well understood that positive student to teacher relationships are an essential part of successful learning processes. Developing strong relationships with students with trauma is especially important because children who are traumatized may struggle with feelings of helplessness, confusion, shame and mistrust. Creating productive relationships can enable students with trauma to use the process of art making to mindfully access painful experiences to make meaning and overcome intrusive memories through the use of structured material experiences (Malchiodi, 2015). Providing emotional relief is not the primary goal of quality art education, but it is an outcome that greatly benefits this demographic of students. Relationships are especially significant for elementary school art educators because many begin working with students in kindergarten and continue to be consistent, supportive adults in their lives every school year. Relationships are a priority for trauma-informed practices and the effects on the mental health and learning outcomes of traumatized students is measurable (Bailey, 2014).

Brain Breaks

During learning experiences our students' brains consume roughly 20 percent of the body's energy (Posey, 2019). For our students with trauma chronic stress can consume a substantial amount of energy. Offering brain breaks such as stretching, walking, jumping, standing, or playing can increase levels of oxygen to the brain and help keep our students' brains fueled and ready to learn. These brain breaks should have clear procedures so that students understand when and how to ask for them. One strategy could be to provide students with a can of wooden sticks with index cards. The cards should have different needs or activities illustrated on them. The students are the keepers of the cards and can quietly signal when they need a break

by holding up the card that they'd like to use. The teacher would then signal back to approve the break and instruction can continue.

Resiliency and Clay

Clay is an incredibly satisfying material with which to work and can be useful in trauma-informed art practices because of the fundamental importance of the sense of touch. Students with PTSD or other diagnoses that affect hyper-arousal of the central nervous system such as ADD and ADHD can particularly benefit from clay experiences. This is because it stimulates the body's sensorimotor system and can help individuals to begin regulating their hyper-aroused brain stem (Malchiodi, 2015). During a 3-Dimensional art lesson with clay, students would use their hands and select tools to construct a ceramic or sculptural art piece designed to meet learning objectives and criteria. Psychologically there is a lot happening when a student interacts with clay. Students can experience feelings of empowerment when they are allowed (within a safe structure) to decide how and where to manage and develop their senses of touch. Clay lessons that require shorter intervals of construction and de-construction of forms support the development of a traumatized student's understanding of controlled change and builds resiliency when students take an existing clay structure apart (Malchiodi, 2015). Working with clay is ultimately a wonderful trauma-sensitive art practice because it can create new synaptic connections in the brain through sensorimotor experiences during the lessons. The sense of competence and feelings of success that can follow a clay experience supports nervous system regulation and better equips our traumatized students' renewed capabilities for responding creatively to adverse situations throughout their lives (Malchiodi, 2015).

Kinetic Sculpture and Emotional Balance

An article from the *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* found that the movement in kinetic sculpture intervention can be reflective of a traumatized individual's struggle to find equilibrium, and that creation of kinetic sculpture can instill hope that one does not have to remain in an unbalanced state (Brandon & Goldberg, 2017). This specific type of intervention was observed clinically to research the impact of kinetic sculpture on those experiencing trauma related to both grief and non-death losses. During this process, the clients involved in the study were able to reflect creatively about the changing nature of family and community roles. I see this activity as something that could be revised and molded into a rigorous art lesson on 3-Dimensional design. In the clinical lesson, the application of the kinetic sculpture served a very specific purpose and target audience. In an educational context, teachers could adapt the basic concepts for a different audience using materials like wire, card stock, beads, hole punchers, photographs, and yarn. The goal of exploring emotional balance with kinetic sculpture can remain the same, to support individuals in processing the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that accompany trauma and to develop cognitive understanding of disruption that can open the doors to our students' adaptive skills (Brandon & Goldberg, 2017).

Metaphor in Art

Developing healthy, productive ways to tolerate pain and distress can help students to overcome the impact of traumatic stress. In an art classroom, lessons can be designed to incorporate literary concepts such as metaphors. During art instruction metaphors are used as images that symbolically represent ideas, experiences, sensations, objects, or actions. Metaphorical thinking can benefit students with trauma because it teaches them a strategy, which allows for familiar circumstances to be seen and represented in new ways. Art provides visual

thinking experiences, and metaphor provides a platform to enhance understanding and present opportunities for change (Cohen, Barnes, & Rankin, 1995).

Wet Media and Control

Art mediums can be organized along a spectrum of dry and resistive to wet and fluid. The physical attributes of art materials differ in how much effort and experience are required for students to manipulate them. Wet media such as ink or watercolor paint takes less effort to manipulate, but is more difficult to control, and can have a loosening effect on a student's psychological defenses (Cohen et al., 1995). During a lesson using wet media consider ways to support students with trauma so that they feel successful and in control of the fluid materials.

Wax resist is a process that uses crayon or oil pastels to create a waxy boundary around a shape or image on paper. When water-based materials are introduced, the wax in the crayon or pastel resists the water-based material and contains the media inside of the drawn boundary.

Understanding material attributes can be a powerful tool for art educators to utilize because it provides traumatized students with a structure for controlling and feeling empowered through the use of art mediums.

Conclusion

There is work to be done to elevate understanding of and respect for art education in our nation's school systems. Taking the empirical evidence that exists about the cognitive benefits of creativity (especially in regards to our students who have experienced trauma), and understanding that the role of arts in education can be legitimized with these findings should be a consideration for those working in the field of education. Should there be a push to allocate more funding, access to technology, and advocate for the arts as essential processes that not only are directly connected to school productivity and learning successes, but are an essential and

necessary tool for all educators to provide for traumatized students? We see the public school system as having striking economic deficits, but each year the United States economy spends hundreds of billions of dollars on treatment of childhood trauma outside of an educational context (Malachiodi, 2015). This is an enormous cost economically, and emotionally, at the expense of our students' well being. A better solution exists if we are willing to reimagine the value of art education and its role in servicing the traumatized students in our nation. This issue is becoming more critically important as the frequency of trauma inducing experiences continue to spread within our nation. Childhood trauma is a public health crisis. It is my hope that this body of writing can establish the reputation of creative processes as being significantly impactful on mental health and, that the evidence might elevate the role of art education as being an integral structure for combating the devastating effects of trauma.

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Appendix A

Pieces of Me: an autobiographical collage

Kay Waterson

5th grade

Allocated time: 3, 60-minute studio blocks



Outcome Statement

Students will combine knowledge of mixed-media art techniques and symbolism to create an autobiographical collage. Students will learn about basic psychology concepts and will participate in a variety of self-care sensory activities to make observations about themselves. Learners will reflect on the sensory activities and create a self-care action plan to accompany

their autobiographical collage. This lesson is important because of the emotional and cognitive benefits that students experience when engaging in creative activity and self-care practices.

Objectives

Students will:

- Use mixed-media strategies to create an autobiographical collage using symbolism.
- Learn about how artists in history such as Frida Khalo have used art to overcome personal challenges.
- Explore multi-sensory creative activities and reflect on how the activities caused a shift in their thoughts and emotions.
- Develop understanding of new vocabulary concepts.
- Learn about strategies for self-care, and create an action plan for being resilient.

Criteria

- Collage pieces must include the use of three or more different art mediums.
- Collage pieces must incorporate three autobiographical concepts and symbolic imagery.
- Student must complete a written survey/reflection worksheet to document their feelings and opinions about their multi sensory self-care activities.

Visual Art Standards

ART.VA.II.5.5 Analyze how art conveys ideas to express one's individuality.

ART.VA.V.5.4 Synthesize connections between the visual arts and other disciplines in the curriculum.

ART.VA.II.5.3 Explore and understand prospective subject matter, ideas, and symbols for works of art.

Integrated Standards

EEW.5.1. Write an opinion about a topic and reasons to support the opinion.

EESL.5.5. Select or create an audio recording, images, photographs, or other visuals/tactile displays to enhance a report or presentation.

Universal Design for Learning & Differentiation:

Multisensory Consideration

During the multisensory self-care activity students will engage in a variety of self-care strategies. Kinesthetic students will participate in movement activities like dance and yoga. Visual-spatial students will benefit from the use of various art mediums. Students will reflect on their learning experiences using intrapersonal skills, and writing. Existentialist students will be given opportunities to consider how choice and creative activity can help build resiliency.

Mind Style/Presentation Consideration

Concrete sequential learners will use a guided survey to make reflections about sensory activity stations within the classroom. An organized rubric with clearly stated criteria for the lesson will be provided to give more structure for student planning and reflection. Abstract Random learners will participate in sensory activities that use movement, essential oils, and novel activity stations to sample self-care strategies. The novel use of symbolism within the autobiographical collages will present playful opportunities for artists to experiment with mixed media.

Anticipatory Set

The anticipatory set for this lesson will include a novel change in how the art classroom environment is arranged. Students will see the work tables spread apart and functioning as separate stations. Each station will have a different sensory activity, materials, and instructions. Students will be invited to walk around to look at the stations on their way to the group area to begin the lesson.

Materials & Tools

Watercolor paper, brushes, watercolor paint, water trays, scissors, glue, paper collage materials, pencils, erasers and sharpeners, colored pencils, crayons, sharpies, essential oils, scented items, pillows, yoga mats.

Resources

- Spotify with noise cancelling headphones
- Yoga pose chart for kids
- Typed reflection worksheet and survey for students to document their experiences with the multisensory self-care activities.
- Writing packet that contains a template for students to plan their self-care action plans.

Concepts & Vocabulary

- Autobiographical: Images or writing samples that are created to teach something about yourself.
- Adversity: Challenging or misfortunate experiences.
- Resiliency: The ability to recover quickly and bounce back from adversity.
- Self-Care: Strategies that an individual can use to help regulate emotions and cope with stressful situations.

Procedures

Day One

Students will enter the room on day one of this lesson to find that the art studio classroom has been rearranged into different stations. This anticipatory set will intrigue students and make them curious about why the physical layout of the classroom has changed. The teacher will invite

students to walk around and look at the stations on their way to settling into the group area to begin instruction. On the white-board, two vocabulary words and their definitions will be written and read aloud. After the concepts of “adversity” and “resiliency” have been discussed and defined students will be invited to share (with an elbow partner) an example of each word. The teacher will state specifically that students do not have to share anything personal that they do not feel comfortable talking about, and that adversity can refer to non-emergency situations (like losing a pet or being stressed out about getting a bad grade). A new vocabulary word will be added to the board and defined. The teacher will explain how self-care strategies can help individuals build resiliency and make themselves stronger when faced with adversity and life challenges. The teacher will give a quick tour of all of the different studio stations and explain the objectives for each station.

- The movement station will have printed yoga pose posters and mats to practice movement as a self-care strategy.
- The painting station will have watercolor materials prepped and ready to be used playfully in an unstructured way.
- The scent station will have pleasant smelling objects like scented candles, essential oils, incense, and shampoo samples that students can practice mindful breathing with.
- The sound station will have soft pillows, different devices and noise cancelling headphones so that students can independently listen to relaxing music and close their eyes.

In groups of four, students will rotate to the different stations and sample the sensory activities at each station. Students will be asked to pay attention to their bodies and their minds and try to notice any changes in emotions, thoughts, or physical sensations as they sample each self-care strategy. A timer will be set and students will spend ten minutes at each station.

Closure

After all of the students have completed the stations, they will return to the group area for a whole class discussion and reflection. The teacher will distribute a short reflective worksheet that will allow students to close the lesson by taking notes about their experiences at each self-care station.

Day Two

On the second day, students will gather in the group area to begin the studio lesson. After a quick review of vocabulary concepts and self-care stations from the previous week, the teacher will introduce the visual art challenge. Students will be introduced to the criteria along with the rubric at the beginning of the lesson so that the learning goals and expectations are made clear before they begin planning their artwork. Students will focus on the vocabulary word “autobiographical” and discuss what this might mean in regards to art. The teacher will present work by the artist Frida Khalo and will discuss her use of symbolism to create autobiographical works of art. Her life will also be discussed within the context of how she used painting to overcome her own adversities within her life. After this lecture, students will be given drawing and painting materials to begin planning their autobiographical artworks. They will be challenged to choose three elements within their work that represent themselves (examples of this could be a literal self-portrait, symbolic self-portrait, intentional use of pattern or abstraction, etc). The teacher will circulate the studio work tables and ask driving questions or offer support when needed.

Closure

At the end of this day, the students will clean up materials and gather again in the group area for closure. Each student will be asked to share their three chosen autobiographical elements that they have selected to use in their work. This will be each student's exit ticket to line up at the door.

Day Three

On the final day of this lesson, students will gather in the studio group area for instruction. Students will revisit their vocabulary concepts and review lesson objectives before returning to finalize their compositions. During this work session, students will continue to develop and finalize their autobiographical artwork. After completion of their work, students will use writing to complete a brief artist statement and self-care action plan to support individual development of resiliency.

Closure

The final closure to this lesson will include built in writing time for student reflections. Completed writing samples will serve as student exit tickets.

Accommodations

Student paraprofessionals will be provided to students with special needs during this lesson. If students are overstimulated by sensory activities, they may choose to take a walk with the paraprofessional.

Appendix B: Assessment Rubric

Criteria	4	3	2	1
Use of mixed-media art materials	Student used 3 or more different art materials in their collage.	Student used only 2 different art materials in their collage.	Student used only 1 materials in their collage.	Student did not combine materials to complete their collage.
Use of symbolism and autobiographical details within work	Student incorporated 3 or more autobiographical elements in their collage.	Student incorporated only 2 different autobiographical elements in their collage.	Student incorporated only 1 autobiographical element in their collage.	Student did not incorporate any clear autobiographical elements in their collage.
Understanding of vocabulary	Student can define all 4 vocabulary words from the lesson.	Student can define only 3 out of the 4 vocabulary words from the lesson.	Student can define only 2 out of the 4 vocabulary words from the lesson.	Student can identify only 1 or fewer vocabulary words from the lesson.
Written assignment	Student has completed all 3 pages of the writing packet and the writing is high quality.	Student has completed all 3 pages of the writing packet, but the writing is not high quality.	Student has completed 2 pages of the writing packet.	Student has completed only 1 or 0 pages of the writing packet.

Appendix C

Self-Care Strategy Survey

Name: _____

Date: _____

As you begin to explore each of the stations, please remember to pay attention to your thoughts, emotions, and sensations that arise from each station. You might find that one of the stations is much more enjoyable and relaxing to you than the others, so it is important to pay attention to your feelings as you move through each activity.

Now that you have visited each station, please take a few moments to reflect on your experiences and give each station a rating. Write down how each activity made you feel because we will be revisiting these surveys next week to continue our lesson! Below, please rate your experiences with each station on a scale from 1 (being the least enjoyable) to 5 (meaning your experience was deeply comforting and relaxing).

Movement Station: 1 2 3 4 5

Painting Station: 1 2 3 4 5

Smell Station: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound Station: 1 2 3 4 5

Which of the 4 self-care stations did you rate the highest and why?

If you were in charge of designing the self-care stations what else would you have included?

Appendix D

Vocabulary Identification

In your own words please explain the meaning of the following vocabulary concepts:

1. Autobiographical:

2. Adversity:

3. Resiliency:

4. Self-care:

Appendix E

Artist Statement and Self-Care Action Plan

Now that your artwork is complete, please take some time to fill in your artist statement so that you can practice explaining the meaning behind the decisions in your art! Please use careful, high quality writing to fill-in-the-blanks below.

1. The mixed-media materials that I chose to combine in my artwork are

_____, _____, and
_____.

2. The autobiographical elements that I chose to represent me in my art are

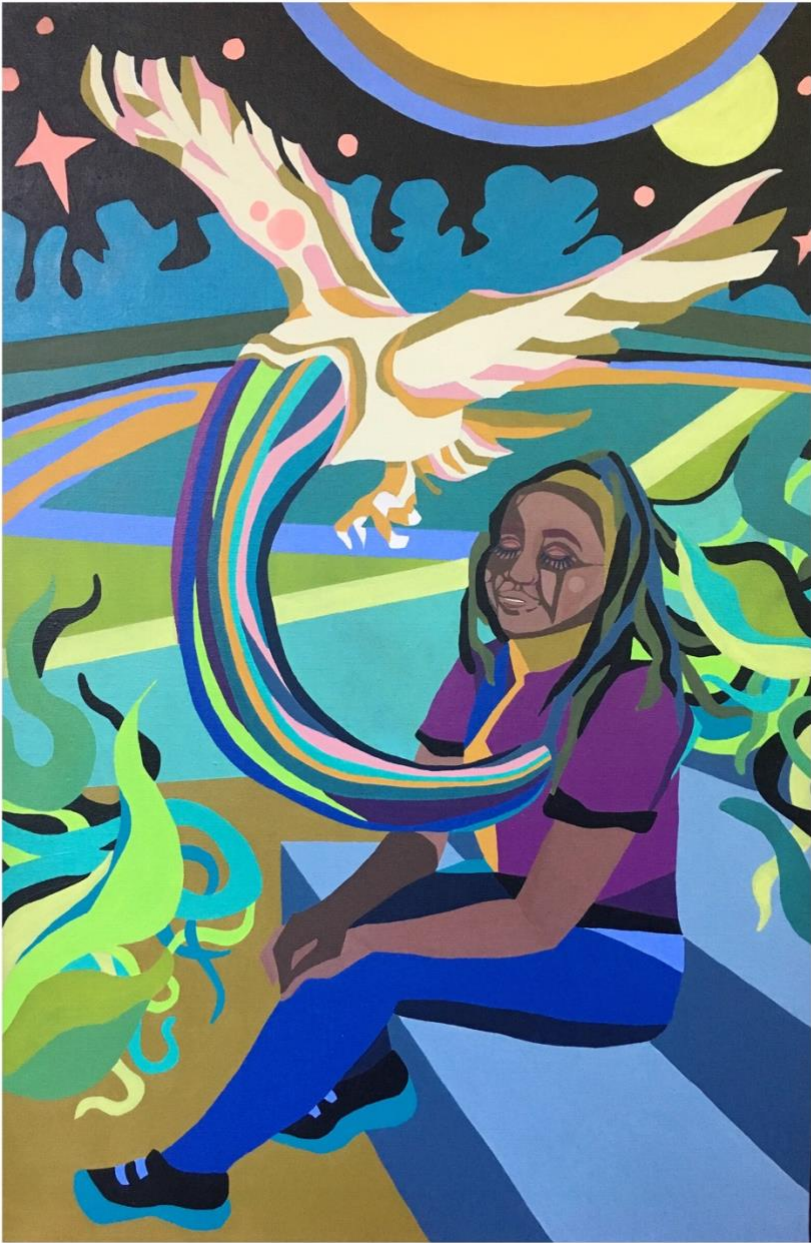
_____, _____, and
_____.

3. Three self-care strategies that I can choose to use if I am stressed or facing adversity are:

_____,
_____, or _____.

Appendix F

Meskrim's Moons



Appendix G

Dissociative Offering



Appendix H

A History of Depersonalization



Appendix I

Quantum Bog

