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## School Social Work and Expressive Art Therapies: A Systematic Review

Margaret M. Whipple  
*St. Catherine University*

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School Social Work and Expressive Art Therapies: A Systematic Review

by

Margaret M. Whipple, B.A.

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Social Work  
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas  
St. Paul, Minnesota

In partial fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of  
Master of Social Work

Committee Members

Kari L. Fletcher, Ph.D., LICSW (Chair)  
Lizzi Kampf, LICSW  
Holly Smart, MA, LP, ATR-BC

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted in a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publically present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

“The history of art is a sequence of successful transgressions.”

-Susan Sontag

“To develop a complete mind; study the science of art; study the art of science. Learn how to see. Realize that everything connects to everything else.”

- Leonardo Da Vinci

## Abstract

This systematic review focused on the use of expressive art therapies in school settings. Data was collected, synthesized and analyzed utilizing two databases. The search criteria involved the inclusion of expressive art therapies being utilized in a school setting, which resulted in 10 relevant articles and studies. A secondary analysis was conducted of the 10 articles to categorize the grey literature or informal studies from the empirical pieces found. Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory was used as the conceptual framework of this study, examining the environments that influence students' access to services and programs. Kindergarten through high school age groups were the main populations examined as well as various expressive art therapy modalities and techniques applied in schools. The findings of this study provide a view into what programs exist and function in regards to expressive art therapies in school environments, as well as implications for future research.

## Acknowledgments

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## School Social Work and Expressive Art Therapies: A Systematic Review

### **Introduction**

Today, clinical social work interventions often transcend the bounds of traditional talk therapy. Instead, various supports can complement each other, provide an alternative to talk therapy, or be adjunctive in nature. Nature based therapies, animal assisted therapies, play therapies, mindfulness therapies, hypnotherapies, and creative arts based therapies are a few examples of these contemporary interventions. In looking at client-centered approaches in school social work, empowering students and groups to tap into their creative process can be healing and allow personal growth, in addition to facilitating increased self-awareness.

Like other complements to traditional talk therapy, the creative arts have become increasingly more integrated into social work theories and treatments in schools and youth outreach programs. This is evident in the St. Paul (Minnesota) Public Schools' program The LAB, which integrates arts-based and wellness activities for 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The program was developed in 2004, utilizing poetry as the prime modality of expression in a school setting with at-risk youth. It has since grown to include "visual arts, technology, experiential wellness and leadership" (Adams, 2014, p. 50). The sessions usually last about 10 weeks. The students fill out an anonymous survey, which conveys strong results in healthy coping skills and self-confidence upon the completion of the program (Adams, 2014).

In the broad field of social work, practitioners have the opportunity to look at the world on a variety of levels and through a multitude of lenses. Art therapy is a practice

that is still fairly new in the field of school social work. Cuts to arts programming in schools and other environments go against the emerging evidence that creative writing, as well as visual and performing arts can benefit to youth, individuals, and communities (Gutierrez & Creekmore, 2008). While the arts have been used in social work practice and mental health care for quite some time, there is little research published on the use of the arts in these fields. It is important to systematically review the effect the arts have had on communities and individuals in order to use this history to develop more effective programming (Gutierrez & Creekmore, 2008). As the school social work profession evolves, social workers need to develop alternative modalities in order to adjust to clients' needs. School social workers should be open to the possibility that the arts can offer a different avenue in reaching students.

While studies have shown that the arts can benefit the health of individuals and communities more generally, there is a gap in the research when it comes to using the arts as a tool for school social work. The purpose of this paper is to explore the use of creative arts within clinical social work interventions, as well as how the arts can support the mental health field, including clinical social work. In this systematic review of the literature, I will examine social work across environments utilizing the Person in Environment conceptual framework. In the process of exploring the literature, I will examine common and consistent themes among clinical social work arts-based interventions, as well as the populations being served and the theories that have evolved.

## Literature Review

The purpose of this paper is to explore the use of creative arts within school social work interventions. This requires unpacking relevant concepts related to the creative arts, the school social work profession, and the evolution of relevant social work theory and practice. It is necessary to explore definitions and the history of creative arts interventions in mental health therapies to gain a better understanding of how to analyze a broad and complex integration as well as evolving useful techniques in the school social work profession.

### Art and Expressive Therapy

*Creative arts* is a very broad term and for the sake of this systematic review, an overview of what it entails is necessary. Malchiodi (2005) used the term *expressive therapy* interchangeably with *creative arts therapy* to describe art, music, drama, dance and/or movement, poetry, play, and sand play therapies. Malchiodi also discussed an “integrated arts approach” which contains two or more of the modalities listed above (p. 3). Each of these modalities has distinctive traits and roles depending on how it is used and applied, while keeping with the best interest of the client (Malchiodi, 2005).

Art therapy, as defined by the American Art Therapy Association (2010), is a therapeutic technique in which an art therapist assists the client(s) in exploration of feelings, self-awareness, and behavior through the utilization of various art forms. This practice requires knowledge of mental health therapy techniques and theories combined with the application of artistic media to enhance the client(s) mental and emotional health. Art therapy, when used in a professional setting, has proven to help those who have experienced or are experiencing trauma, disease, and illness, as well as mental

health issues. Art therapy is practiced in a multitude of settings and among a wide range of individuals and groups (American Art Therapy Association, 2015).

### **School Social Work**

This systematic review examines how expressive art therapies can be beneficial and utilized in the school setting. Therefore it is important to examine the role of a social worker in the schools. The School Social Work Association of America defines a school social worker as one who provides services directly and indirectly to students and families and provides a connection between student, school, home, and community to encourage success (School Social Work Association of America, 2010). With the school being a primary environment for most youth, a school social worker can convey resources and support to students, parents, teachers, other support personnel, district administrators, and community members. A collaborative environment is key in creating positive outcomes in school social work.

### **Historical Perspectives of Social Work and Expressive Arts**

In order to understand the context of modern day art therapies, it is important to examine the history of the arts in therapeutic and social work settings. Stankiewicz (1990) examined how the arts were utilized in the settlement houses of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Creative and expressive arts were a part of the early social work movement and were evident at Hull House in Chicago. A newspaper from that era declared the Hull House program to be “the exaltation of art for the benefit of the masses” (Stankiewicz, 1990, p. 35). Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr, the co-founders of Hull House, had different perspectives on implementing the arts into their work. Starr was heavily influenced by the reformers of the British Arts and Crafts movement with the

idea that social change can be influenced by art, while Addams developed arts programs that enhanced the wellbeing of the residents and clients of Hull House (Stankiewicz, 1990). In Addams' first-hand account, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, she describes how music, visual arts, and dramatic plays were created by residents and neighbors of Hull House, ranging in age from school age children to the elderly and serving as an empathetic and unifying catalyst in a diverse community (Addams, 1910/2006). Both individual as well as community art integrations were present in the early social work movement.

In addition to looking at the beginnings of art in social work, an understanding of the beginnings of contemporary art therapy must be examined as well. Margaret Naumburg, a psychologist of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century as well as founder and director of the Walden School in New York City, is regarded as the pioneer of art therapy. Her work focused on how art can be used in the domains of psychotherapy and in educational settings (Naumburg, 2001). Naumburg (2001) gave an overview of how art can be a tool to reach a deeper understanding of oneself and provided two examples through case studies of how it can be used. Naumburg acknowledged Freud's theories as a basis for her research and took psychoanalysis a step further by adding drawing and other visual expression to traditional talk therapy.

Naumburg (2001) gave two examples of how art therapy can be used. In first case study, a nine-year-old seemed to be "depressed and withdrawn" (Naumburg, 1964/2001, p.49). Through half-hour drawing sessions over the lunch hour, the girl's teacher found the girl was isolated at home and the girl opened up about her home life. Eventually the teacher found that the mother felt the other students would view their family in a negative

light for living in a small apartment, while most of the students lived in larger, nicer homes. The added pressure to do well in school was another factor (Naumburg, 2001). Eventually the child recognized the barriers through her situation and her withdrawn and depressed behavior changed (Naumburg, 2001). In the second case study, a four-year-old child had a difficult time every time her mother left for work. Picture-making was introduced to her at a young age as a means of dealing with nightmares, and later as a means of dealing with her mother leaving for work on a daily basis (Naumburg, 2001). Both cases illustrate how drawing and coloring can be used in conjunction with talk therapy to enhance a person's wellbeing.

Malchiodi (2005) gave a general overview of expressive therapies, also known as art therapies. Malchiodi acknowledged that individuals have unique learning abilities as well as unique visual, tactile, and audible expressive abilities, and argued that recognizing these abilities could make communication more effective. Malchiodi explained that each modality has its own part in therapy. For instance, music and dance therapy may be utilized in group settings to enhance relationship building and social skills, while visual arts may be used in an individual setting to elicit feelings and unlock the unconscious mind (Malchiodi, 2005).

Malchiodi (2005) cited numerous studies that suggest the arts have played a healing role in medicine dating back as far as the ancient Egyptians. Music therapy was also used on wounded soldiers during World War I, and in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, art therapy found its way into well-known psychiatric hospitals (Malchiodi, 2005). According to Malchiodi, when using expressive or art therapies, it is imperative to know the current ethical guidelines set forth by the specific modality before implementation.

When not trained in a specific modality, the practitioner may draw his or her own interpretations of the result, rather than allowing the client to recognize the result (Malchiodi, 2005). When the practitioner chooses the most appropriate modality, there is the possibility of opening up the individual or group's ability to achieve self-discovery and empowerment (Malchiodi, 2005).

### **The Use of Expressive Therapies in Social Work**

It is important to understand what researchers have discovered about the use of expressive therapies in social work settings. Stuckey and Nobel (2010) conducted a systematic review of creative arts usage in health care settings. They reviewed articles published between 1995 and 2007 that used both qualitative and quantitative methods to study music therapy, visual arts, expressive writing, and movement therapies as a means of healing (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). This study did not look at how the arts impacted mental health issues across the life span. The researchers found that both qualitative and quantitative data are needed to support the development of more creative arts therapy programs. For instance, the descriptions in the qualitative studies can be used in combination with the quantitative data to help “understand creative engagement and health effects among generalized populations with unique individual differences” (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010, p. 261). The majority of the studies they reviewed were conducted in health care settings rather than community settings (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). The authors emphasized how the arts can complement traditional medicine by helping create a holistic view of the patient (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010).

Much of the literature focuses on arts based interventions used in health care settings. Hafford-Letchfield, Leonard, and Couchman (2012) built on this approach by taking into account the developing individual as well as a wider world view in implementing an art therapy practice. They reviewed several papers that support the use of the arts in “health and social care” and make the case for social work education to recognize these emerging practices (Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2012, p. 683). The authors determined that the literature reviewed covered a wide range of use of the arts in social work, primarily with individuals, including how the visual and tactile arts are used in care for dementia patients as well as the use of poetry in communicating trying situations or emotions. In addition, the authors recognized the use of the arts in social work practice on an international level as the articles reviewed originated in various countries, including Ireland, Israel, the United States, and the United Kingdom. They concluded that integrating the arts into social work practice is well supported by the literature and made a strong case for the intersection and integration of the social sciences and the humanities (Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2013).

Building upon the worldview of the arts and social work, it is also necessary to examine how individual cultures use and view art making as a therapeutic practice. Moxley (2013) explored the arts in social work in a cultural context. In regards to cultural diversity in social work practice, Moxley found that

art-making is a promising avenue of cultural practice in social work, and its diversity makes it a rich and contextually relevant grand strategy for working with groups and communities who form cultures in response to the oppression or marginalization of its members. (Moxley, 2013, p. 251)

Moxley found that being aware of the cultural context and the universal component of art can be beneficial to a group as well as the individual to potentially educate a community through various modalities, much like Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr did with Hull House. Moxley also looked at art not only as a unifying mechanism, but as a complement to the healing process as well as a coping mechanism for those who have been diagnosed with an illness or disease or who have experienced trauma.

For a social worker, it is important to stay current with new practices and integrations, yet it is also important to maintain boundaries and to be ethical in one's practice. Damianakis (2007) highlighted the boundaries that must be maintained when integrating the arts and social work. Damianakis conducted a qualitative study to explore the experiences of "15 creative writers, 2 teachers of creative writing, 11 'arts inclusive' social workers, and 3 social work researchers" for a total of 31 individuals, well experienced in their field (p. 527). The key themes found included:

(a) the arts and social work aim to emotionally, physically, and spiritually move us and be moved in the world; (b) both depend on the construction of language, expression, and communication' (c) the arts enhance personal and professional self reflection; (d) the arts transcend social work knowledge dichotomies and provide integrated model for social work body-mind-spirit connection in a social context. (Damianakis, 2007 pp. 529)

Damianakis went on to explain that there are limitations and risks associated with using the arts in social work practice, including recognizing ethical boundaries. In general, the author called social workers to be adaptable to arts in practice and willing to accept challenges and interferences that may arise (Damianakis, 2007).

Talk therapy is seen as the norm for therapists and social workers, so some researchers have developed metaphors to help describe how the arts fit into this expectation. Sinding, Warren, and Paton (2012) examined the literature to extract metaphors for how the arts and social work can work together. Three main metaphors were focused on including “how art ‘works’: getting stuff out; inhabiting others’ worlds; and breaking habits of seeing/ knowing.” (Sinding, et al., 2012, pp. 190). The concept of talk therapy being the norm was also discussed. Sinding et al. originally intended to focus on exploring the arts and social work, but their research evolved into looking at the importance of the metaphors and language used in the data collection. The authors concluded that the metaphors give the social worker a better understanding of what can happen in utilizing the arts in practice (Sinding et al., 2007).

### **Mental Health Services in School Settings**

The two main components of this study are expressive art therapy and school social work. Due to the fact that school social work encompasses a broad area, along with the fact that knowledge of other school based and community supports is essential to effectively work with students in a collaborative way, I have chosen to use the term *school-based mental health services* in this literature review. The term provides an umbrella for services school social workers can access in order to effectively work with students on a multitude of levels.

Hoagwood and Erwin (1997) conducted a 10-year research review on the effectiveness of school-based mental health services. Though the article is nearly twenty years old, it provides important information about the history and implementation of school-based mental health services. Hoagwood and Erwin argued that schools should be

a primary setting for children's mental health services, and traced the implementation of school-based mental health to Chicago in the late 1890s. After legislation was passed to provide "free public education" for all school age children, social workers and mental health practitioners began to see schools as a logical place for children to receive a range of specific and tailored support services to assess children's mental and physical needs (Hoagwood & Erwin, 1997, p. 436). Hoagwood and Erwin's study shows a need for more comprehensive studies on school-based mental health programs and specified outcomes. With more empirical studies and creating a strong scientific foundation, the possibility of more programs will emerge and improve (Hoadwood & Erwin, 1997).

While Hoagwood and Erwin examined the historical perspective of school social work, Powers, Bower, Webber, and Martinson (2011) conducted a small study in which they gathered perspectives of school-based mental health practitioners. Powers, Bower, Webber, and Martinson looked at the importance of mental health resources in school settings and conducted qualitative interviews to understand the perspective of school-based mental health practitioners on resource promotion and needs within the systems. The setting for the study was in the Southeast United States in a large urban area; the convenience sample consisted of psychologists, social workers, teachers, and other support staff from elementary, middle, and high school settings (Powers et al., 2011). The common themes that emerged were (a) the need for increased staff, (b) the need for communication and training opportunities, and (c) as the need for access to and communication between community resources (Powers et al., 2011). The researchers also found that time and funding were primary barriers to utilizing and maximizing existing

and new resources. They recommended more exploration of student outcomes so that funding could be allocated for existing and new programs (Powers et al., 2011).

### **Expressive Therapies and the School Age Population**

The studies and articles reviewed so far primarily focus on art therapy use in healthcare settings and adult populations, but researchers have also studied the use of expressive art therapies among school age children and youth.

Riley (2001) wrote about the benefits of art therapy utilization among youth. According to Riley, teenagers can often be unwilling to look to adults for help and in turn art therapy is an alternative modality to express feelings in a non-intimidating way. The art produced by the adolescent can serve as a catalyst in conversation and discovery. Art therapists do not interpret the produced work, yet they help the client reveal the meaning behind the piece (Riley, 2001). Some benefits include the fact that there are two forms of communication, verbal and visual, which helps the therapist understand the situation more clearly. Another benefit is that adolescents can be resistant to traditional talk therapy, which might hinder the building of trust between client and practitioner. Art therapy can also help develop a trusting therapeutic relationship (Riley, 2001).

Wright, John, Alaggia, and Sheel (2006) provided a specific example arts-based interventions used with youth in a community setting. The authors evaluated a national program in Canada called the National Arts and Youth Demonstration Project (NAYDP) over a three year span, to see if the program could engage and maintain low income youth, ages 9-15, in an after school program which primarily included drama but also included visual and other media arts. Other pieces evaluated included the positive

outcomes of the program, as well as the development of social skills of the participants according to the students and their parents (Wright et al., 2006). The researchers used qualitative interviews as well as quantitative questionnaires, and the results revealed experiences were positive for both the youth and parents. The participants in the program yielded higher gains in development of social skills than those in the control group, and a reduction in emotional issues (Wright et al., 2006).

In another program evaluation, Coholic, Eys, and Lougheed (2011) conducted a qualitative study to determine the effectiveness of an Arts and Mindfulness based program that aimed to increase resilience in at-risk children. The Holistic Arts-Based Group Program (HAP) was a 12-week arts and crafts program that enrolled male and female students, ages eight to 14, and promoted the creative process through a strengths-based approach. Coholic et al. also used a control group. The children in the particular groups had been in the child protection system and came from diverse backgrounds and experiences. The researchers found promise in programs such as HAP, even though their data suggested no positive correlation between participation in the program and outcomes (Coholic et al., 2011). Benefits of the program included a base for skill building and personal growth as well as the flexibility the program offered in regards to children's "needs, culture and goals" (Coholic et al., 2011, p. 842).

Kim, Kirchoff, and Whitsett (2011) also studied youth and arts-based interventions, specifically the development and implementation of a group that met for eight weeks in a school setting. The participants of the groups ranged in age from 11 to 13 and were dependents of active military parents or guardians. The group was facilitated by two social workers that helped guide the group through beginning, middle and end

phases (Kim et al., 2011). Music, play, drama, visual, and movement arts were used in the 8-week session. The authors expressed the importance of age-appropriate programming as well as addressing multicultural issues. They also found that supportive parents can be beneficial in the encouragement of the student (Kim et al., 2011). The authors also emphasized the positives of operating the group in a school setting, noting that the “multi-disciplinary approach” and maintaining communication among staff helped in the effectiveness of getting the students the services they needed (Kim et al., 2011).

The literature reviewed here covers a wide range within the area of the arts and social work. In order to understand this broad field, it is important to examine general overviews, qualitative studies, and articles describing the historical background of the practice. It is also important to look at the various ways art can be implemented within school social work environments, given the positive outcomes in other environments and contexts.

## Conceptual Framework

For this systematic review, I will examine the literature on social work and the arts across environments, utilizing Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory. Urie Bronfenbrenner was a psychologist and human development researcher who looked at systems and in turn pioneered Ecological Theory, which is based in the idea that the environment impacts an individual (Hutchison, 2011). Bronfenbrenner believed there are multiple layers to one's environment across one's lifespan, including formal and informal relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Other layers include physical environment, a person's development, and time; for instance, historical events and life changes may impact one's development (Forte, 2007).

To understand this theory, it is necessary to dissecting and discussing these multiple layers. The core is the microsystem, or the individual's setting. This could be one's home, educational setting, work or any environment in which one has regular interactions. Personal interaction occurs at this level more frequently than in the outer settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This is a critical environment for the developing human being as it is described as being one's "life space" and where the individual spends a significant amount of time (Forte, 2007, p. 136). In optimal circumstances within this environment, an individual may use the arts without mental health interventions. This microsystem environment could become strained when an individual is utilizing mental health therapy, but is not willing to commit to conventional talk therapy. One's microsystem environment can be enhanced when arts based interventions in mental health therapies are utilized in an ethical manner and when appropriate. For instance, if

an individual has trouble verbalizing events and situations, she might use creative expressions such as journaling or painting and drawing techniques that aid in the communication process.

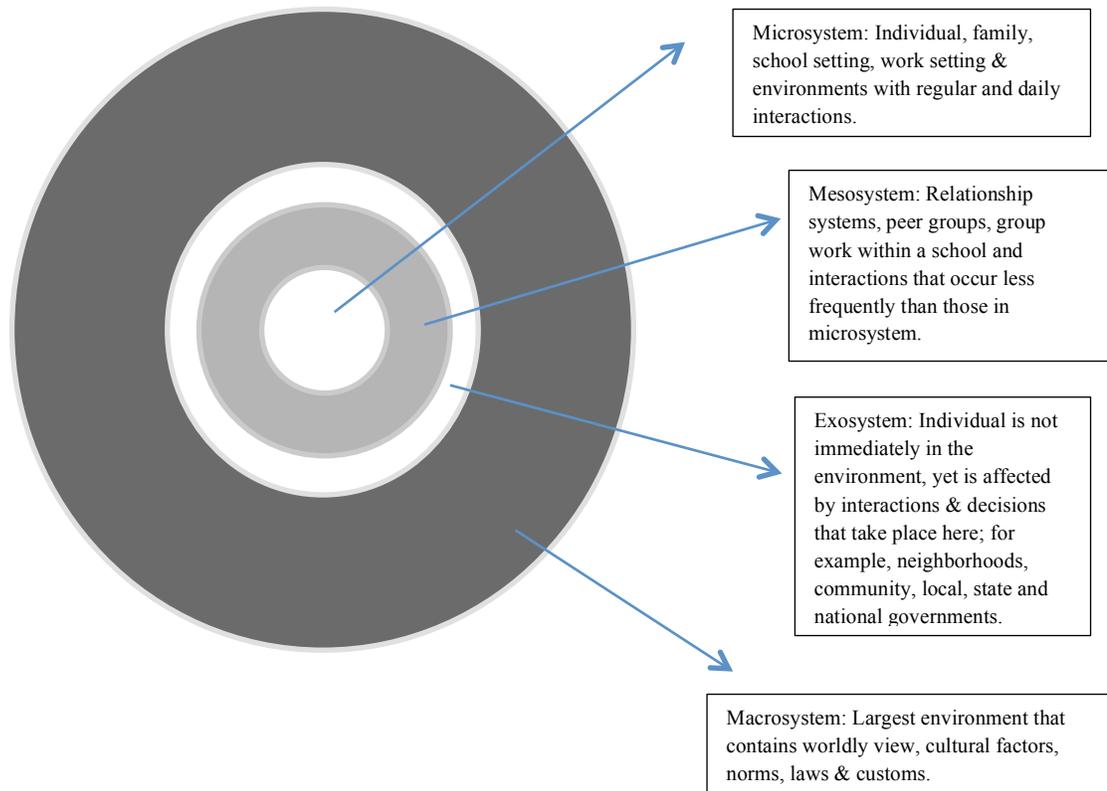
The mesosystem is the next layer in the model. In Bronfenbrenner's words, mesosystems "comprise the interrelations among major settings containing the developing person at a particular point in his or her life" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515). An example of a mesosystem would be one's peer group. This is an extension of the microsystem, creating a "system of relationships" (Forte, 2007, p. 136). In a mental health or social work setting, this could be a group that meets on a regular basis. In an optimal environment, this could be a group within a school that meets to use various media arts together, without needs for mental health therapies. As a mental health intervention, this could be a group that has experienced similar trauma and poetry and/or visual arts could be utilized as a catalyst to fuel the conversation. It could strengthen the dynamic among the members and instill a trust factor within the group.

Bronfenbrenner's third layer, called the exosystem, branches off of the mesosystem and encompasses a larger area. The individual is not involved in the immediate setting, but is affected and impacted by the events that are contained in this environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Both formal and informal structures and institutions are contained in this level as well as the larger work environment; neighborhood and community; mass media; the multiple layers of government including local, state and national; transportation; and communication (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). An example of this is would be a social worker who advocates for programs within the micro- and mesosystems, for instance, within a program's budget in the context of the

larger institution, helping to build the community through arts-based interventions.. Funding could depend on the outcomes provided at the micro- and meso- levels.

The macrosystem is the largest of the environments. The micro-, exo-, and mesosystems are housed in this environment and contain patterns of cultural practices as well as norms, laws, and customs (Forte, 2007). Bronfenbrenner suggests that these are not just physical institutions, but a means of transferring implicit and explicit information (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The example that Bronfenbrenner gives is a child and caretaker, and their place in the larger contextual environment, including how they are treated and interact in various surroundings, as well as how laws can impact the situation (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). One example of the macrosystem in school-based social work is the cultural factor in working with populations. Arts-based interventions could be a very positive experience for some, but not all. Therefore, knowing the population of one's clientele is significant in providing client and / or population centered interventions. Arts based interventions on a larger level could initiate conversations across cultural lines, providing an empathetic vibe and giving a different view into the group's culture, norms, traditions and practices.

Holistic views have emerged from ecological theory. There is a dependence on individuals to their environment and the connectedness to living and nonliving objects creates an ecosystem in the human development arena (Forte, 2007). This is where multiple interventions can be utilized across different environments and be used as a tool in enhancing one's experiences within those environments. Figure 1 provides a visual in helping understand the concept of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological theory.



*Figure 1.* Illustration of ecological theory.

## Methods

The current literature on the use of expressive arts in school social work spans a wide variety of definitions, applications, and techniques, in addition to use across environments and populations. In this systematic review, I investigated common themes, theories, and interventions in the use of art therapy in school social work. The objective of a systematic review is to gather literature that is based on a specific question, utilizing a methodical and clear organizational structure, with the intent that the study can be replicated (Littell, Corcoran, & Pillai, 2008). A systematic review “follows a protocol (detailed plan) that specifies its central objectives, concepts, and methods in advance” (Littell et al., 2008, p. 1).

The goal of this study was to investigate the integration of expressive art therapies into school social work, as well as to highlight the terms and concepts that have emerged from these two fields. I explored the various types of expressive therapies in school settings, as well as outcomes and common themes. In addition, I examined the environment and type of modality (visual arts, performing arts, written word, etc.). A summary of my systematic search and selection is illustrated in Figure 2.

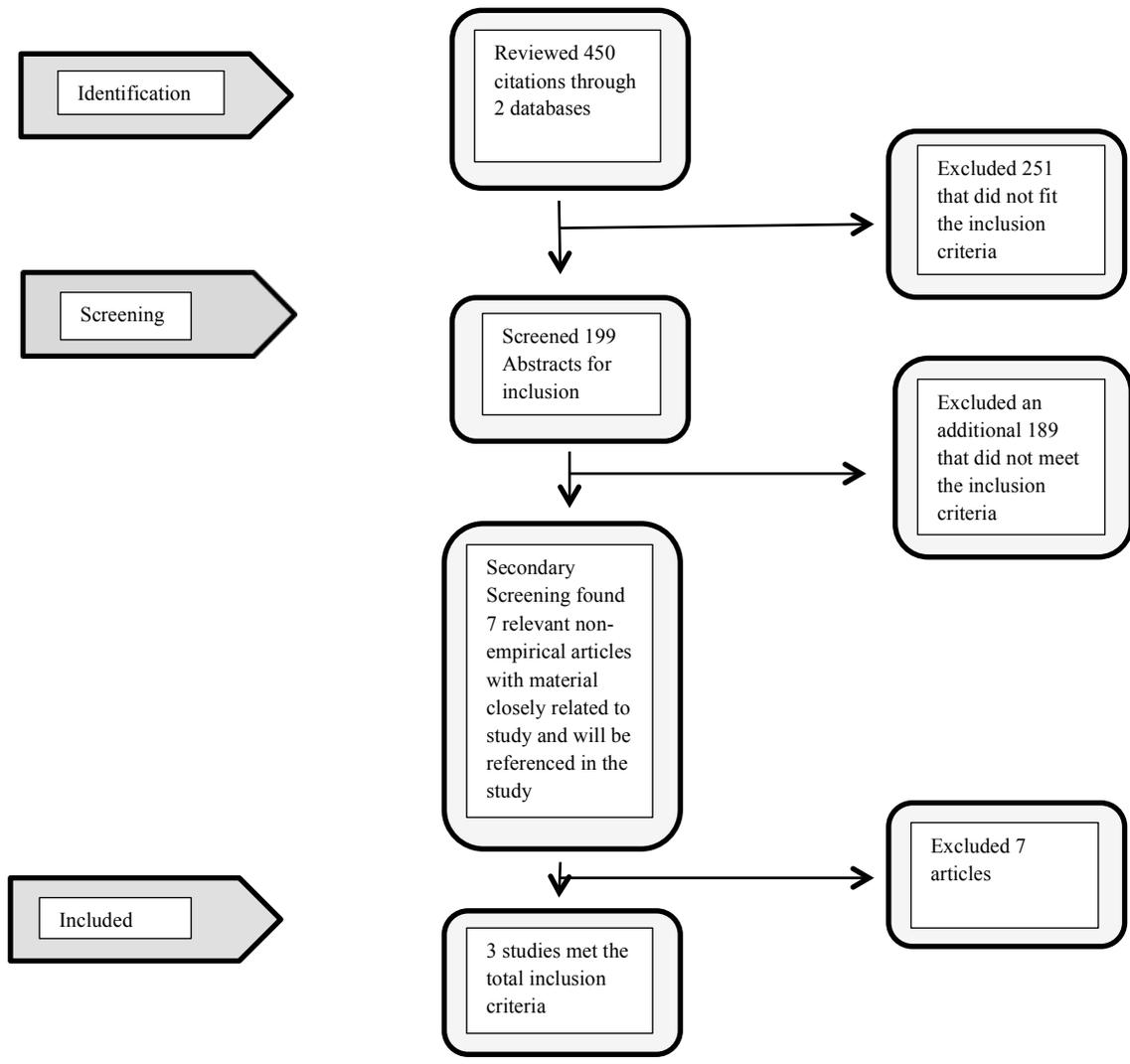


Figure 2. Flow diagram that outlines studies throughout the selection process.

### **Selection Criteria**

The objective of this study was to review all available studies that explore expressive art therapies in school social work, specifically in a school setting. I reviewed theoretical and empirical studies of arts based interventions in schools as well as the details surrounding the modality utilized in the study. I also explored each article's conceptual framework. The initial searches yielded many articles that varied in relevance and significance to this study's central focus. I considered articles that included school social work and art therapy if the terms were mentioned in the abstract. I excluded dissertations and unpublished studies as well as articles that only briefly mentioned the central focus of this study.

### **Search Strategy**

I conducted the literature search from September 2014 through April 2015 and utilized two databases, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) and SocIndex. Terms used included *school social work* and *art therapy*. The initial search found 450 total articles that included the terms *school social work* and *art therapy*.

I considered three selection criteria when vetting articles for use in this review. First the article must have expressive art therapy in a school setting as the primary focus. Second, the study's population must be school age, specifically, grades Pre-K through 12. Third, if the article was available in full-text form, and included the previous items, I included it in the synthesis.

I reviewed the title and abstract of each article and eliminated the 251 articles that did not meet the selection criteria. The number of articles that fit the initial search criteria was 199. I reviewed the abstracts of these articles and eliminated the

articles if they did not meet the criteria. Ten articles remained and I reviewed these extensively.

I then completed a secondary screening of the ten articles. Seven of the 10 articles contained relevant information worth referencing in this particular study, yet did not fit the full criteria. Of the 10 articles, three studies fit the criteria of an empirical study conducted within a school setting on the use of arts based interventions. In the summary of findings, the non-empirical findings will be referenced as an “article”, whereas the empirical, full criteria findings will be referenced as a “study.”

### **Data Abstraction and Analysis**

The next step of the process was to critically review the remaining articles. I reviewed each of the articles four separate times, examined them in depth and extracted important information. In the first critical review, I examined the framework utilized in the study. Secondly, I extracted components of expressive therapies. Third, I extracted the populations of the study. Finally, I extracted the outcome. A compiled summary and table was created for analysis and synthesis for when the data was collected and reviewed.

### **Limitations**

There were some factors to consider in that this study held some inadequacies. Limitations of this study included the fact that this is a relatively new area of study; therefore, there were not many articles on this topic. Another limitation was that only ten articles were reviewed and only two databases were utilized. There were cases where the abstract looked just right for the systematic review but there was no way to access it. I reviewed books for general information in the literature review; however, I did not

review them for the purpose of the study. I also excluded dissertations and other unpublished material.

There were some instances where a particular publication focused on arts-based mental health techniques and I utilized multiple articles from the publication. This factor has a positive and a negative side. The fact that a particular publication focuses on arts-based interventions can be convenient to those looking for resources is a positive aspect. On the opposite end, the awareness of arts based interventions may have a limited audience due to the possibility that the publications have a specified audience.

## **Findings**

This chapter summarizes the findings. Main points of articles and studies are highlighted and examined. For the sake of this systematic review, the findings are categorized into grade levels and a chart is included to emphasize the foremost concepts that emerged from the research.

The following is what was found in the research. A total of ten articles met the search criteria and fell into four groupings in regards to grade level, Pre-Kindergarten through grade 12:

- Large Range of Grade Levels (3)
  - Pre-Kindergarten-Grade 12 regular and special education (1 article)
  - Kindergarten-Grade 12 special education (1 article)
  - Grades 3-12 (1 article)
- High School (2)
  - Regular and Special Education (1 article, 1 study)
- Middle School (3)
  - Transitioning to High School (1 study)
  - Middle School Girls (1 article)
  - Students experiencing grief and loss (1 study)
- Elementary School (2)
  - Regular and Special Education (1 article)
  - Students dealing with domestic violence issues (1 article)

There were other findings that were also in this systematic review that are worthy of mentioning, including the modalities and activities of the programs as well as the history, implementation, and sustaining features of each program. Table 1 references the main points extracted from the non-empirical relevant articles, while Table 2 references the data extracted from empirical full criteria studies.

Table 1

*Non-Empirical Relevant Articles*

| <b>Author(s)</b>                    | <b>Theoretical framework</b>           | <b>Type of study/evaluation</b>        | <b>Population</b>                          | <b>Art therapy components used in school-based program</b>           | <b>Themes and outcomes</b>   |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Isis, Bush, Seigel & Ventura (2010) | Ecological (implied)                   | Informal Research and Program Overview | K-12 Students with Special Education needs | Mixed-media  | Over 30 years of programming in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the 4th largest school district in the Nation, strong support from teachers, parents and community in retaining its continuation. Empowerment, emotional recognition. Assessment prior to obtaining art therapy services. Documentation of outcomes is a large part of the continuous funding. Use of Silver Drawing test and Levick Emotional and Cognitive Art Therapy Assessment in screenings and assessments. Collaboration. Dual licensure in Art Therapy and a related field in teaching. Individual and small group instruction. |
| Nelson (2010)                       | Developmental and ecological (implied) | Informal Research and Program Overview | Pre-K-12                                   | Animation (technology based art therapy), music therapy, mixed media | Emotions, coping skills, social skills, empathy, self-confidence, acceptance. Culturally diverse. Psychological, social and emotional issues. Integration of therapy and various academic subjects. Shows for the community. Both general and special ed are serviced under this program. Brief Solution-Focused therapy. Collaboration. Continuing education through presentations and case consultation. Financial challenges. Time restraints in conducting research for grant purposes. Dual licensure in Art Therapy and teaching. Group and individual therapy.  |

| Author(s)                            | Theoretical framework      | Type of study/evaluation   | Population                      | Art therapy components used in school-based program   | Themes and outcomes  |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Sutherland, Waldman & Collins (2010) | Adlerian Approach          | Informal Research and Program Overview; mentioned outcome statistics                                   | Grades 3-12                     | Drawing, murals, sculpture, mandala, mask making,   | Chicago Public Schools. Group therapy. Self-awareness, social, emotional and academic, skills. Year-long program, both regular education and special education students are referred by teachers, administrators. Collaboration and cooperation. Assessment is completed and group as well as individual therapy is implemented. Empathy. Tracking 150 students - 80% of those that were in the program attended school and there was a 36% improvement in graduation rates. |
| Sassen, Spencer, & Curtin (2005)     | Relational-Cultural Theory | Informal Research and Program Overview   | Middle School Girls             | drama therapy, visual arts in a multitude of medias, ceramics and clay,   | Interactive projects and discussion, connections fostered in the group as a model for relationships outside the structured model, self-esteem Non-verbal connections through group art projects, discussion, facilitator acts as a mediator to help group members resolve conflict on their own, empathy evolves throughout the process, strengths-based, diverse populations.   |
| Veach & Gladding (2007)              | Ecological (implied)       | Informal Research and Overview of the Use of Creative Arts based integrations at the high school level | High School Students            | Music, movement, visual art, literature, drama, play, humor, group therapy, expressing emotions, engagement and connection, growth and development, self-esteem, connection with the outside world, individuation | Group work and creative therapies coupled together provides variety and flexibility in reaching high school students, which can be difficult at times. Need for research on individual modes of expressive therapy (i.e. just the use of music therapy in group work or individually)  |
| Thompson & Trice-Black (2012)        | Developmental (implied)    | Informal Research and Program Overview   | Elementary school-aged children | Bibliotherapy, play therapy, visual arts and role play,   | The article broke down specific objectives for implementing and facilitating groups for young children who have experienced domestic violence, in a school   |

| Author(s)                             | Theoretical framework   | Type of study/evaluation                        | Population                      | Art therapy components used in school-based program   | Themes and outcomes  |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Ziff, Pierce, Johanson, & King (2012) | Developmental (implied) | Informal Research and Overview of Pilot Program | Elementary school-aged children | finger-paint, chalk, pastels, watercolors, etc. to evoke relaxation and emotional expression. Drawing, colored pencils, clay, sculpture, etc. to teach empathy, emotional recognition, and biofeedback. Collages, sculpture with recycled and found items, etc. to help teach problem-solving and goal setting. | <p>setting. This environment is beneficial for incorporating such groups since it allows it to occur in a safe environment and is accessible to a wide array of children, since school is a large part of their lives.</p> <p>Pilot program entitled, <i>ArtBreak</i> works with elementary school aged children. It is open to all students and the article is a documentation of the process in order to help develop and maintain the program, it also calls for similar programs to document and reflect on what has worked and not worked in order to become more efficient. Safe environment, with mixed ages in groups ranging from 5-11 and used to enhance skills in problem solving, social skills and express feelings.</p> |

Table 2

*Empirical Full Criteria Studies*

| <b>Author(s)</b>              | <b>Theoretical framework</b> | <b>Type of study/evaluation</b> | <b>Population</b>   | <b>Art therapy components used in school-based program</b>   | <b>Themes and outcomes</b>   |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Finn (2010)                   |                              | Case Study                      | Middle School aged children   | drawing, painting, drama, music and collages   | Group interventions in a school setting for kids who have experienced grief and loss. Evaluated 5 students who met once a week for 1 hour, in a 9 week frame. The authors acknowledged the lack of empirical research on group art therapy especially in the area of grief and loss. They also made the case for utilizing art as an added modality to help clients learn to cope with grief and loss through providing a case example. Students responded with positive feedback in regards to the group format through written evaluations of the program. |
| Spier (2010)                  | Developmental (implied)      | Mixed-Method                    | Eighth Grade (transitioning to high school)   | drawing with narrative descriptions, stress mobile, masks, storyboards with role-play, group art therapy with at risk students   | In a small study with 6 eighth grade students, it was found that the students became more verbal and expressive throughout an 8-session group art therapy experience as found through the qualitative and quantitative data. The hypothesis was partially supported yet, positive outcomes in how the students recognize and manage stress   |
| Wilson & Ziomek-Daigle (2013) | Grounded Theory              | Qualitative Study               | High School Students (study was conducted by interviewing counselors in training on the use of expressive therapies in internship within a high school setting) | Visual arts, Drama, Literature, music, qualitative study, resistance in using expressive arts with older students, time restraints, acceptance among the students, comfort in using expressive therapies along with experience. Unconscious to the conscious | Small study of 5 high school counselor trainees, who took a course in expressive arts counseling techniques. The researchers found three phases in implementing expressive therapies with high school students in regards to the practitioner, "Apprehension/resistance, Comfort and Endorsement." Noting that with proper training and experience practitioners can utilize expressive therapies effectively. Calls for the inclusion of expressive therapy in training curriculums and programs.   |

## **Non-Empirical Relevant Articles**

**Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12 programs.** Within the 10 articles reviewed, three fell into a category that examined larger, district wide programs. Programs in Jersey City, Chicago, and Miami-Dade County Schools were examined. The articles provided insight to the history, sustainability, and outcomes of the programs.

***Jersey City Public Schools.*** Among the three district wide programs was Jersey City Public Schools. Jersey City Public Schools incorporated a creative arts therapy program in 1993 after the district supervisor found that more could be done in reaching the needs of special needs students (Nelson, 2010). In the data collected for the district, a large proportion of the “students are socioeconomically challenged and approximately 13% are identified as needing special education services” (Nelson, 2010, p. 62). The school is highly diverse; there are 104 languages spoken in the school, and 8% of the students are participants in the English as Second Language classes (Nelson, 2010).

With the collaboration of the district supervisor and art teachers, the Jersey City Public Schools program has expanded since 1993, including both regular and special education and employing 10 art therapists and five music therapist to cover the 16 schools included in the district (Nelson, 2010). Expressive art therapy is provided to both individuals and small groups and is incorporated into the classroom (Nelson, 2010). Self-esteem and confidence, emotional recognition, social skills, accepting differences, empathic responses and character building are the program goals (Nelson, 2010). Jersey City School District art therapists work collaboratively with social workers, teachers, and administrators to provide comprehensive services to the students of the district. Various media are used in the program, but the one that stands out is the *Animation Project*

where middle school students are taught computer animation skills through academic and therapeutic techniques (Nelson, 2010). This shows ingenuity in creating and maintaining an expressive art therapy program within a school setting.

Since 2007, the Jersey City Public Schools program has also contained a community outreach component where it hosts an open house event for staff, parents, and community members. One of the art therapists created large plaster masks for the attendees to paint, which resulted in a large community art project that received praise. Not only was it a community project, it brought several cultures together in a positive light (Nelson, 2010).

The program experienced challenges, such as funding, the need for research, and evidence that the program works. Another hurdle is that the district requires that the art therapists in their schools be teacher certified (Nelson, 2010). Informal research has provided some understanding of the outcomes of the program, yet a more formal assessment would be beneficial to the program (Nelson, 2010). The team at Jersey City Public Schools maintains a cohesive and open-minded approach by providing the best possible practices for the students and finding ways to overcome challenges (Nelson, 2010).

***Miami-Dade County Public Schools.*** In a similar series of events, the Miami-Dade County Public Schools have come to have the longest running school-based art therapy program in the nation. This program provides services to children with emotional-behavioral issues ranging from grades Kindergarten through 12 (Isis, Bush, Siegel, & Ventura, 2010). The pilot program was launched during the 1979-1980 school year and included a collaborative means for various departments to provide expressive art

therapy services through a certified art therapist, to students with special education needs (Isis et al., 2010). Results and feedback from the pilot program yielded positive results. Students who had a difficult time in regular education classes benefited from working with an art therapist within the school setting (Isis et al., 2010).

Much like the Jersey City Public Schools, the art therapists in the Miami-Dade County Public School program work closely and collaboratively with social workers, teachers, administrators, and school psychologists to provide comprehensive services to the student as well as the family (Isis et al., 2010). Although specific media are not mentioned in the article, it is implied through pictures that a mixed-media approach is used. For example, in one picture there are two masks that were painted by an adolescent girl, which show “Me on the Outside” and “Me on the Inside,” representing the girl’s view of herself. Another photo illustrates a partnership with a local university art gallery where various media are displayed (Isis et al., 2010, p. 57). Collaboration in the community is a key component in a program such as this, to educate and bring awareness to art therapy and its benefits, to establish new relationships, and to provide a link between culture, education, and community (Isis et al., 2010).

***Chicago Public Schools.*** Another school-based program is Art Therapy Connection in Chicago Public Schools. Sutherland, Waldman & Collins (2010) explored the program designed for at-risk students in grades three through 12 and utilizes an Adlerian approach, emphasizing group identity, cohesion, and cooperation. Sutherland et al. provided insight into the objectives and goals and informal outcomes, as well as the media and modalities used.

The Chicago Public Schools program is designed for students who have little or no access to mental health care and are able to participate in the program throughout the school year (Sutherland et al., 2010). One of the main goals of the program is to provide a means for students to unite as a group and learn to cooperate, building trust while maintaining their own sense of self and individuality (Sutherland et al., 2010). Art therapists help educate and guide school staff and teachers on what to look for in a student who may need services. Behaviors include truancy, poor grades, sadness, aggressiveness, defiance, withdrawal, and negativity. The referral process includes observation by school staff and teachers as well as permission from a parent or guardian for the student to be a part of the Art Therapy Connection Program (Sutherland et al., 2010). The therapists in the Art Therapy Connection program maintain a high level of communication and collaboration with teachers and other support staff, leading by example and providing “synergy” and cooperation for the students to witness (Sutherland et al., 2010).

Sutherland et al. (2010) described the media utilized in this program, which include but are not limited to drawings, murals, mandalas, and mask making. An example of media utilized and outcome is evident by an example used in the article. A 12 year-old girl was able to verbalize and express her feelings after drawing a picture depicting a situation that had happened in the home. With support from the art therapist, she was able to manage and regulate her emotions and was able to concentrate in the classroom (Sutherland et al., 2010).

The Chicago Public Schools program has a few modes of evaluation, including documenting changes in student’s behaviors such as “cooperation, attachment,

participation and trust” (Sutherland et al., 2010, p. 73). They collect this data by surveying the students involved in the program mid-year and at the end of the year. Feedback from administrators and teachers is also part of the evaluation process. Another tracking method was looking at graduation rates. In 2008, 78% of participant in the Art Therapy Connection program graduated, compared to the overall graduation rate of 56% (Sutherland et al., 2010). The authors strongly suggest that more research in this area is needed as positive outcomes are visible to the practitioners, teachers, parents, and others in the students’ microsystem and mesosystem environments (Sutherland et al., 2010).

**High school programs.** Veach and Gladding (2007) described various art therapy techniques that can be incorporated when working with high school groups. According to Veach and Gladding, developmentally appropriate activities can be effective in working with high school students. The authors looked at the various media that could be used in groups of high school students; they focused less on work with individuals.

Veach and Gladding (2007) emphasized the development of the emotional and cognitive aspects of students’ lives, and mention that school provides a safe environment to employ creative group techniques. The authors break down each medium, which include music, movement, visual arts, literature, drama, play, and humor and assess how appropriate and effective each can be in group work with high school students. The authors also suggest that creative group work among high school students can be productive and economical through presenting a large quantity of material in a short amount of time.

Veach and Gladding (2007) also described specific and unique techniques in working with high school aged students. They are unique in that they suggested play and

humor as media for high school students. Play can involve games that require hand-eye coordination such as volleyball and basketball to work on teamwork as a skill or it can involve board or video games as well (Veach & Gladding, 2007). Games in a structured environment can foster an awareness of others and the environment as well as provide an opportunity for introspection for the student (Veach & Gladding, 2007). Similarly, humor and laughter used in a positive manner can have a positive effect for the group and gives the group a sense bonding and a shared history (Veach & Gladding, 2007). Humor could also be utilized as an icebreaker to get to the tough subjects and bring the group together. The authors suggested collaborating with librarians in keeping positive social media on hand, such as developmentally appropriate comics and books (Veach & Gladding, 2007).

**Middle school programs.** The next phase in this research deals with the middle school age group. Sassen, Spencer, and Curtain (2005) focused on this age group and described a more specific implementation of expressive arts based interventions. Studies focusing on this age range, including Sassen et al., focused primarily on urban middle school girls as a population.

Sassen et al. (2005) described *Art from the Heart*, a program designed to help middle school girls of diverse backgrounds proactively foster healthy relationships. Relational-Cultural theory is the basis for the program, with its basic theory being healthy development is most likely to occur when positive and healthy relationships develop (Sassen et al., 2005). Adolescence is a time of transition, where negativity and disconnection can lead to fear in establishing healthy relationships, and with early interventions this can be somewhat avoided.

Developmental and cultural context is used in *Art from the Heart*. Culturally, participants may be English as a Second Language students and unable to put a word to a feeling. In a similar context, developmentally, adolescents may not be able to verbalize their feelings well (Sassen et al., 2005). Thus, an expressive art therapy group may be a positive avenue for a diverse group of individuals in this age range.

In Sassen et al.'s (2005) case study, a culturally diverse group of girls met after school for 10 to 15 weeks; participants ranged in grade levels from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>, and often were at risk for mental health issues, lived in poverty, and had some type of stress in their home situation (Sassen et al., 2005). Although this group met outside of school hours, it was still considered school-related due to the level of school involvement in supporting the group. Modalities and media used in the group included drama, play, ceramics, mask making, and drawing. Group discussions were guided by a facilitator who helped students develop a sense of empathy (Sassen et al., 2005). Groups such as this provide a model in conflict resolution, connection, and healthy relationships for adolescents.

**Elementary school programs.** I reviewed two articles that dealt with elementary school-aged children. The two are very different in terms of population; however, they share the fact they are both implemented in a school environment and make use of diverse media. One is open to all students and shares elements of art education and the other is geared more specifically to implementing a group in a school setting with members who have experienced domestic violence.

Thompson and Trice-Black (2012) highlighted the ways group interventions can be used in an elementary school setting through expressive art based group interventions. The authors recommended structured interventions, which could include play therapy,

role-plays, videos, art-projects, puppets, bibliotherapy, and games to elicit feelings and promote safety planning for students who experience domestic violence (Thompson & Trice-Black, 2012). The authors suggest the use of such media can provide a safe, anxiety free distance from the situation the student may be experiencing (Thompson & Trice-Black, 2012).

The main objectives of this specific program for children experiencing domestic violence include “conflict resolution and problem solving, identification and expression of feelings, reduction in self-blame, safety planning, knowledge, awareness and attitudes about domestic violence, and self-concept” (Thompson & Trice-Black, 2012, p. 237-239). This program was a hybrid of traditional group talk therapy and expressive therapies. For instance, in order to meet the first objective of conflict resolution and problem solving, children explored through games by taking turns and sharing, using their vocabulary to openly express their feelings, and recognizing others’ expressions and feelings (Thompson & Trice-Black, 2012).

Thompson and Trice-Black (2012) emphasized the effects that domestic violence can have on children and sheds light on school-based mental health interventions. Most if not all children have access to mental health services in school settings; some children do not have access to services outside of school. Young students who have witnessed or experienced domestic violence are at-risk for developing and expressing difficult behaviors later on in life, for example, substance abuse in adolescence (Thompson & Trice-Black, 2012). This program provides students with a safe environment and a structured group approach to preventing these risk factors from becoming reality.

Ziff, Pierce, Johanson, and King (2012) explored a pilot program for elementary school aged children entitled *ArtBreak*. The program engages students in multiple media by allowing them to choose the medium in which they prefer to work, creating an environment where abilities such as problem solving, social skills, relaxation, and recognition of feelings can be enhanced and developed (Ziff et al., 2012). Certain media corresponded with an emotion or skill; for example, finger-paint, chalk, pastels, and watercolors were utilized to evoke relaxation and emotional expression. Drawing, colored pencils, clay, and sculpture were used to teach empathy, emotional recognition, and biofeedback. Collages and sculpture with recycled and found items were utilized to help teach problem solving and goal setting (Ziff et al., 2010).

Upon evaluating this pilot program, Ziff et al., found that a sense of community emerged among the group members as well as among the staff and administration. Although this program is not as structured as some that are mentioned above, it still offers an avenue to providing expressive art therapies to all students in a school setting. Limitations include funding for supplies, as well as time and space. The authors also suggested utilizing, recordings, photographs, written communication, and reflection from stakeholders including students, parents and guardians, teachers, and school administrators in the documentation process. They suggest these inclusions may provide a strong case for funding and grant purposes (Ziff et al., 2010).

### **Full Criteria Studies**

The full criteria studies extracted from the search are few, yet hold insight into how expressive art therapy interventions can help within the middle and high school levels. They also show the importance of evaluation and how it can be used on many

levels for grant and funding purposes. It can also be used as a tool for adapting and making the program more efficient through feedback from different perspectives.

**High school programs.** Out of the 10 articles assessed, Wilson and Ziomek-Diagle's (2013) qualitative study was unique in that it followed a small convenience sample of School Counseling master's degree students after completing a course on implementing expressive arts into counseling. Phone interviews were conducted over the course of time the students spent practicing elements of expressive art therapies in their school setting, resulting in three interviews after the four expressive techniques taught in the course were completed.

Wilson and Ziomek-Diagle (2013) examined the implementation of expressive art therapy techniques through the lens of new practitioners. The new practitioner responses that emerged from the study included resistance and apprehension, comfort in executing expressive art therapies in practice, and endorsement (Wilson & Ziomek-Diagle, 2013). In the apprehension and resistance phase, it was found that the participants could envision themselves utilizing various modalities with grade school children but not with high school students. Time and schedules proved to be one of the factors in the apprehension and resistance phase as well; some modalities take up a significant amount of time and practitioners worried about the amount of time a student would be kept from classes as well as the perception of the administration (Wilson & Ziomek-Diagle, 2013).

The outcome of the study of new school counselors found an increase in comfort with using expressive art therapies such as drama, literature, music and visual arts as they progressed in the study. As their comfort levels with expressive art therapies increased, so did participants' willingness to endorse the use of expressive therapies among high

school students (Wilson & Ziomek-Diagle, 2013). Although this was a small sample and study, it provided insight into the views of those working with high-school students and using expressive art therapy techniques. Data utilized in this study was focused on developing a theory about expressive arts therapy among high school student. As one of the study participants noted,

I think my comfort level with the techniques influenced the outcome more than any other factor. I learned what students liked, I familiarized myself with the techniques, and I tried to match the students with the techniques. (Wilson & Ziomek-Diagle, 2013, p. 12)

This response shows that using non-verbal techniques among high school students can be another tool for practitioners. Although this study did not include school social workers, it gave insight into the use of expressive therapies in a school setting. This study also relates to Ecological Theory, as school social workers often collaborate with multiple educators, administrators, and other professionals to provide comprehensive services to students.

Both Veach and Gladding (2007) and Wilson and Ziomek-Diagle (2013) focused on working with high school students exclusively and provided a more general perspective. These studies provided ideas that could be utilized for both regular education and special education. Although the two studies were very different, they both suggested ideas for practitioners and gave insight into the development of adolescents.

**Middle school programs.** Finn (2003) used a case study approach to examine a school based grief group in a middle school setting. Five students attended the group and all had experienced loss in one form or another. For example, one dealt with being in

foster care, another dealt with the death of a family member, and the others dealt with divorced, separated, or absent parents (Finn, 2003). Many of the students displayed disruptive behaviors in the classroom and were referred to the group.

Participating students attended nine one-hour sessions. Each session contained an expressive art therapy activity facilitated by a school psychologist and a certified art therapist (Finn, 2003). Drama, painting, drawing, music, and collages were some of the vehicles utilized in the group to help the members cope with the loss they experienced (Finn, 2003). Outcomes and evaluation were informal comments noted during the sessions by the students as well as a written survey evaluating the goals of the group. Although the results were not laid out completely in the study, Finn noted that the participants felt that the program helped them.

Spier (2010) also studied the middle-school population, employing a mixed method approach to study a group of eighth grade students who exhibited disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Eight sessions were completed with activities that included multiple drawing exercises, creation of a “stress mobile,” mask making, role-play or drama, and storyboards (Spier, 2010). Spier measured the perceptions of both parents and students. Results indicated many positive, observable behaviors that were exhibited by the participants in the study. In regards to the qualitative data recorded, the researcher interviewed parents or guardians and gauged their perceptions before and after the group. Of the parents and guardians who responded, there were also positive behaviors reported, such as less anxiety and an optimistic outlook about the transition to high school (Spier, 2010).

Although these studies were small, both provided ideas that can be utilized in other environments and can be adapted to fit the needs of a different age group.

### **Modalities and Media**

This systematic review has covered several media and modalities of expressive art therapies. Isis et al. (2010), Sutherland et al. (2010), and Spier (2010) specifically mentioned mask making as a metaphor in helping students recognize themselves inside and out and instill a sense of self awareness. Traditional media and expressive arts such as drawing, painting, group murals, music, mandalas, bibliotherapy or literature, role-play and drama, ceramics, and movement were mentioned specifically in several of the ten articles. The non-traditional media and expressive arts that stood out included sculpture using repurposed and recycled items, humor, and technology based art therapy in utilizing animation. Throughout the literature in this systematic review, it is clear there are several avenues school based mental health workers can use in implementing expressive therapies in their practice.

## **Discussion**

The main finding that came from this study is the lack of empirical evidence on school-based creative expression interventions. Many of the relevant articles that were mentioned in this review had some remark or discussion in regards to this deficiency in school based art therapy programs. Some implied and others explicitly noted the cause of this gap in the literature, often citing the lack of time and funding to complete a comprehensive, empirical study. Although funding and time is a difficult factor to overcome, comprehensive evaluation of programs that contain expressive art therapies will help quantify the effectiveness of these therapies for students. This in turn may result in further funding for and expansion of these programs.

As noted in this review, there were seven articles that contained overviews or grey literature, in which informal evaluations and student, teacher, and community verbal supports were most likely the reason programs were maintained and supported. More concrete evaluations of expressive arts therapy interventions in a school setting are needed in order to maintain such programs. This task may be challenging, as the arts are inherently difficult to quantify, and it may be tedious to break down each media and modality to show how it uniquely helps students.

Because research is ongoing, more studies may have been published on expressive art therapies in schools since the publication of this document. In spite of that, this research gives a snap shot of what is available on this topic and what still needs to be studied. My hope is that this review adds to the evidence that expressive art therapy is a

positive and useful tool from which children and adolescents can benefit in their development.

It is important to consider the school environment when implementing programs. Throughout the review it is evident that there are several ways the arts can be implemented. However, time, funding, and a supportive staff, community, and administration are all pieces necessary for a successful program as shown in a portion of the articles reviewed in this study as well as an understanding of art and its role in multiple environments. As social workers, it is also important to recognize ethical boundaries; not all schools employ a certified art therapist and if they do, many times, as evident with the Miami-Dade County schools, the district requires a teaching license in addition to the existing art therapy certification (Isis et al., 2010). It is also essential to recognize the role school social workers play in a collaborative environment.

Art is not owned by one specific entity. It is a shared part of our diverse world that allows others to empathize, generate conversation, connect, and help bring the unconscious to the conscious through a multitude of media and expressions. Kalmanowitz and Potash (2010) examined the intersection between artists and art therapists. The use of art in mental health therapies is common, as is the artist utilizing art as a tool in the social and community environments; for example, using art to raise awareness of social justice issues.

### **Ethical Concerns**

The use of art in various mental health capacities is an increasingly popular concept. As social workers, psychologists, therapists, teachers, and community workers, it is important to realize and recognize that art therapy is an accredited profession and

ethical boundaries must be maintained (Kalmanowitz & Potash, 2010). Certified art therapists may provide trainings to non-art therapists for many reasons, one being lack of resources in the area. These trainings help the profession grow by educating other therapists on the fundamental components of art therapy (Kalmanowitz & Potash, 2010).

The American Art Therapy Association put forth a detailed set of ethical guidelines (2015). Among the detailed text, it describes the importance of confidentiality and expressing the fact that if the work is going to be displayed, all identifying information must be removed (American Art Therapy Association, 2015). Another piece is the issue of using modalities and materials that may be beyond the therapist's abilities. This raises the importance of keeping up to date with continuing education and in keeping within best practices (American Art Therapy Association, 2015).

Professionals in mental health settings have a responsibility to the client to consider their best interest. One way to do this is by sharing knowledge and information with other professionals and letting the client know the options available. Another way is by protecting the client by practicing within ethical boundaries. Seeking supervision and case consultation with a certified art therapist is one way to hold therapists and social workers who lack an art therapist credential accountable.

### **Collaboration**

Collaboration is key in school social work to provide effective services to students. Many of the articles and studies in this review showed that collaboration between teachers, administrators, art therapists, and community resources is necessary to the implementation, maintenance, and sustainability of an arts-based expressive therapy program within a school. For example, Nelson (2010) described how an art therapist held

a workshop in hopes of educating staff on the benefits of expressive art therapies as well as to boost cohesiveness and communication among the team. Feedback from the staff proved to be highly encouraging and requests came in for more workshops of similar nature (Nelson, 2010).

Students can develop emotionally, academically, and socially within a safe school environment (D'Agostino, 2010). It is important for school social workers, teachers, and other support staff to take initiative and provide multilevel supports to students. Research has shown that collaboration across systems makes treatment planning and other interventions more efficient (D'Agostino, 2010). Effective communication across macro and micro environments, from advocacy, professional organization memberships, community, school, family and student groups, is necessary to create a well-rounded service model.

### **No Child Left Behind Effects**

Another point worth mentioning in this systematic review is that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation has effected expressive art therapies in schools. Policy, although not part of the immediate environment of individual students, can affect how services are delivered and what is taught, especially when it comes down to funding based on outcomes. Closing the achievement gap between at-risk students and privileged students is one of the goals of NCLB (Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009). Helping students overcome academic problems is only one focus of school social workers; they also consider the students' larger environmental context, such as social network, family, and community, and consider how these factors may be impacting or hindering the student's success (Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009).

Isis et al. (2010) described how NCLB impacted students in Miami-Dade County Public Schools. With the implementation of NCLB and testing of reading, writing, and math, there was increased stress on the administrators, teachers, and students to do well to maintain and increase funding. Isis et al. noted that the added challenge of this testing forced the art therapist already employed to not only aid students in maximizing their academic abilities but to also focus on reducing student anxieties and boosting self-confidence.

### **Environmental Context**

The conceptual framework used in this systematic review was Ecological Theory, which suggests larger environments and surroundings affect an individual. By giving students a safe environment to express themselves, social workers and others can help deepen their connection with the outside world and give them a voice and tools to articulate it in a positive and healthy manner. According to Sutherland et al. (2010), students understand the use of power and oppression and they rebel against it, but if the invitation to express freely is given in an environment of safety, many students respond to kindness and friendship regardless of race, gender or ethnicity. (p. 70)

Clearly, expressive therapies in a school setting can help promote life-long skills for students to use in making the world a better place one person at a time, one project at a time.

### **Implications and for Social Work Practice and Research**

This research adds to the literature as to the benefits of expressive art therapy utilization in schools. However, more research is needed to help expressive art therapy

programs within schools thrive and develop. As found in this systematic review, larger programs as well as some small programs provided non-empirical evidence through informal research that expressive art therapy works. The three empirical studies were conducted with smaller groups and indicated that there were benefits to use of expressive art therapy in school settings.

In regards to more research, both large and small studies are needed in supporting the concept of expressive art therapies in schools. It is also important to look at where programs are implemented. It is evident in this systematic review that much of the school based expressive therapy services and programs are implemented in larger schools. Future research should also look at what is occurring in smaller school districts and how expressive art therapies are being utilized, in addition to the barriers preventing such programs and techniques to be developed and used.

The goal of this research was to provide a snapshot of what is occurring in schools in regards to implementing expressive art therapies. As noted above, school age children and adolescents may not be as responsive to traditional talk therapy; this may be developmental or they may simply be more comfortable with expressive art therapies. Social workers work with a multitude of individuals and practitioners and must inform and educate in a variety of environments, the benefits and possibilities of expressive art therapy utilization in school settings.

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