



Collaborative Leadership Between Art Teachers and Art Therapists for Art Students on the Autism Spectrum

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Abstract

In this article I investigate the teaching strategies of two art therapists and two art teachers working with students on the autism spectrum. The study takes place in self-contained and inclusion classrooms at an elementary school and a middle school in an American urban district. In the following article I record the behavior modification techniques, physical and verbal, of these two groups of art professionals. My interest is in determining if participants were successful in constructively altering the social behavior of these students. In this article I identify successful teaching strategies for this special needs population in an American educational setting and I determine the presence of a mutual beneficial relationship between art therapists and art teachers.

There are several educational approaches that address current issues

impacting art students with disabilities, in particular those on the autism spectrum (Derby, 2011; Gerber & Guay, 2006; Gerber & Kellman, 2010; Wexler, 2009). The historical relationship between art education and art therapy is credited to the long-standing pioneering influence of Viktor Lowenfeld. Lowenfeld emphasized art as a vehicle for self-expression of children's life experiences (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987; Burton, 2001; Young, 2013). Art educator, Furniss (2008b, 2010) and art therapist, Martin (2009) argue there is an urgent need for teaching professionals to know about successful strategies for teaching art students on the autism spectrum.

Furniss (2008b, 2010) and Martin (2009) argue there is an urgent need to identify successful strategies for teaching art students on the autism spectrum.

With the passage of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004, children with autism were placed in special education programs (Bain, 2009). While art educators frequently work with students mainstreamed into their classrooms, art therapists have more extensive experience working with children on the autism spectrum in different settings (Albert, 2010; Evans & Dubowski, 2001; Henley, 1992; Isis et al., 2010; Kramer, 1993; Nelson, 2010). Mainstreaming of special needs students in art classrooms is an ongoing trend (Furniss, 2008b). Furniss (2008b, 2010) and Martin (2009) argue there is an urgent need to identify successful strategies for teaching art students on the autism spectrum. The purpose of this research was to identify successful techniques and strategies by art professionals in altering the social behavior of these students with constructive consequences such as completing structured art assignments.

Background

Autism is a spectrum disorder. Recent genetic research is focused on identifying the gene sequences that cause autism, or "the autisms," in all its expressed manifestations (Geschwind & Levitt, 2007). More recently, "autism" has been referred to as "autism spectrum" and the individual categories such as Asperger Syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) have been incorporated (www.autismspeaks.com). The three criteria for diagnosis are: impairments of interpersonal relations skills, impairments of social communication skills, and repetitive and restrictive behaviors and interests (Cohen, 2006). Children with autism have a delay in speech

acquisition and challenges establishing friendships with peers (Frith, 2003). Beyond the criteria for diagnosis are symptoms that may or may not manifest, such as hyper or hyposensitivities to sensory information (Dunn et al., 2002; Grandin, 2006), self-stimulatory behavior, and self-injurious behavior (Koegel & LaZebnik, 2004). Grinker (2007) questions whether certain cultural conditions help people with autism “improve their ability to learn, communicate, and participate in social and economic life” (2007, p. 11). Children with autism can express a broad range of intelligence from cognitively disabled to highly intelligent (Cohen, 2006; Grandin & Panek, 2013). They may possess a type of intelligence different than neurotypicals in terms of creative abilities (Frith, 2003; Furniss, 2008a; Grandin, 2006; Kellman, 2001; Sacks, 1995). As such, Prizant (2015) argues the importance of creating a community of compassion that includes actively respecting those with autism in contemporary society.

The few examples of past research are mostly case studies of individual artists with autism such as Nadia, Stephen Wiltshire, and Jessica Park (Furniss, 2010; Hermelin, 2001; Martin, 2009; Sacks, 1995; Selfe, 1978). The results of a significant group study of children with autism and nondisabled children who participated in cooperatively structured art activities demonstrate that nondisabled children initiated social interaction more frequently than children with autism (Schleien, Mustonen, & Rynders; 1995). There are several existing theories about autism such as Theory of Mind (Baron-Cohen, 1995), Weak Central Coherence Theory (Happé & Frith, 2006) and Enhanced Perceptual Function Theory (Mottron et al., 2006). I argue that the presence of affect within the context of interpersonal relationships and interveners during artmaking, is evidence to suggest a new theory to explain the phenomena of early artmaking called Enhanced Visual Reciprocity (EVR) (Furniss, 2008b).

Methods

My qualitative research study investigates the role of participants such as art teachers, art therapists, and art students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs) of autism in an urban school district. The purpose is to determine successful behavior modification techniques and strategies of art teachers and art therapists who instruct special needs students on the autism spectrum (Alberto & Troutman, 2003; Furniss, 2009; Lichtman, 2013). My research focuses on the teachers' and therapists' success in altering the social behavior of these students. In particular, this study is concerned with the constructive consequences, including achieving the target behavior of completing structured art assignments. In general, the art therapists condition socially appropriate behavior, such as self-regulation, to increase the successful mainstreaming of several autistic students into art classrooms. The art professionals in my study work together across disciplines to

demonstrate collaborative leadership and teach this specific special needs population (Rolling, 2013; Sawyer, 2008).

Procedures

I acquired consent from the art teachers, art therapists, and parents of non-disabled and children with ASD and received IRB approval through my affiliated university. I collected their written art lessons. I observed the art teachers and art therapists in their classrooms. These observations occurred three consecutive times, for a total of twelve visits over Spring of 2012. I photographed the students' art processes and art products during each lesson (see figures 4&5). I also conducted structured interviews with the art teachers and art therapists immediately after they taught each lesson. The questions focused on what techniques they used and the details of the individual circumstances. See Figure 1 for more details about the research methodology.

<p>Participants</p> <p>2 art teachers, 2 art therapists, non-disabled students and students with classification of autism on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).</p> <p>At the elementary level, one child with autism who originally was in the art therapist's class was mainstreamed in an inclusive art classroom with an art teacher.</p> <p>At the middle school level, two children with autism in the art therapist's class were mainstreamed in an inclusion classroom with an art teacher.</p>
<p>Setting</p> <p>2 self-contained art classrooms and 2 inclusion art classrooms.</p>
<p>Location</p> <p>2 urban public schools at elementary and middle school levels of 1 urban district.</p>
<p>Data Collection</p> <p>Written observation notes. Transcribed structured interviews of art professional participants documenting social interactions (physical behaviors and verbal communications). Photographs documenting the students' art process and art product. Written art lessons provided by art teachers and art therapists.</p>
<p>Time Duration</p> <p>I observed and interviewed each of the 4 art professionals for 3 consecutive times, for a total of 12 times over a period of a few months.</p>

Figure 1. Specifics of the Study

Participants and Setting

The participants were at two schools in one urban district in New Jersey. Two female art teachers taught in inclusive classrooms at the elementary and middle school levels.

Additionally, two female art therapists worked with students on the autism spectrum in self-contained classrooms at the elementary and middle school levels. All of the art teachers and art therapists had more than ten years experience, and all had worked with children with autism for several years. All participants were active in staff development, and had received formal training about working with this specific population.

Additionally, all professional participants were artists themselves.

The student participants included both non-disabled students and students with the IEP classification of autism. The schools' student population was culturally and racially diverse, with many immigrant low-income families not speaking English at home. The school was positioned in a district with an award winning creative art therapy program.

This program was started in 1993 by the district supervisor of Visual and Performing Arts Department (Nelson, 2010). In the section that follows I detail the findings from the art therapists and educators involved in the study through a careful description of their classroom practice, student outcomes, and behavior modification approaches.

The school was positioned in a district with an award winning creative art therapy program. This program was started in 1993 by the district supervisor of Visual and Performing Arts Department (Nelson, 2010)

First Art Therapist.

The first art therapist worked at the elementary school. She attended district-wide art teacher and art therapist professional development days that were available for the first few years she worked in this district. She worked in self-contained classrooms with six students on the autism spectrum, four boys and two girls. The students were ages six through eight years old and in K-2nd grades. All of the students were verbal with fine motor skills ranging

from adequate to poor. The first art therapist brings art materials on a cart. She works with the special education teacher and two paraprofessionals who participate in the sessions. The art therapist was placed at a table that was also used for other subjects and activities, making it a generalized location for learning. The goals of her sessions were to increase the ability for self-management and self-regulation, increase self-awareness, improve communication skills, and work with others in a group. The art therapist begins with a greeting. This included all of the students introducing themselves and taking turns saying the name of the art therapist and shaking her hand while making eye contact.

<p>FIRST ART THERAPIST</p> <p>Hand-over-hand (shaping)</p> <p>Redirecting</p> <p>Verbal prompting</p> <p>Rewards (stickers)</p>	<p>FIRST ART TEACHER</p> <p>Modeling</p> <p>Praise</p> <p>Chaining (step-by-step)</p> <p>Rewards (intrinsic): "art is the reward"</p> <p>Rewards (provides "choice time," or doing preferred activity afterward if time permits)</p>
<p>SECOND ART THERAPIST</p> <p>Hand-over-hand (shaping)</p> <p>Modeling</p> <p>Redirecting</p> <p>Prompting</p> <p>Chaining (step-by-step)</p> <p>Praise ("good job")</p> <p>Rewards (gift to mothers, money to support art program)</p>	<p>SECOND ART TEACHER</p> <p>Hand-over-hand (shaping)</p> <p>Modeling</p> <p>Verbal prompting (directives)</p> <p>Praise</p>

Figure 2. Behavior Modification Techniques Used

The art therapist read the book *My First Book About The Five Senses*. She stated, "...we read a story...and I have them interacting in the stories, so they're asking questions, they're responding, and some of them read and then we do art which is usually 15 to 20 minutes generally speaking." The art therapist supported students' creativity by assisting them with participation through hand over hand, re-directing, and prompting (see Figures 2 and 3). The

art therapist had a communication board with written directions for making Gak¹. The students took turns reading the step by step directions out loud. The children were encouraged to explore the physical properties of Gak and manipulate it with their hands to create new forms. After the art activity, the children were encouraged to engage in imaginative play with their creations. A boy who was the only one to create a square shape and then identify it said, "I made a [television]." The art therapist plays along and says, "How do you turn it on?"

<p>Shaping, or hand-over-hand, is when the adult's hand physically guides the action of the student's hand.</p> <p>Modeling is when the adult performs an activity and the student imitates the behavior.</p> <p>Step-by-step, or chaining, is when the adult performed a behavior in sections so the student could follow her behavior more easily.</p> <p>Praise such as "good job" is a verbal comment by the adult stated when a student's target behavior was achieved. It is a secondary reinforcement.</p> <p>Rewards reinforce socially appropriate behavior. Rewards can be external things such as stickers or intrinsic such as allowing a student to perform a preferred activity after completing a new challenging task.</p> <p>Verbal prompts, or commands, direct the student to achieve a target behavior.</p> <p>Physical prompts, such as giving an art material, direct the student to achieve a target behavior.</p>

Figure 3: Definitions of Behavior Modification Techniques Used

During another art lesson, the art therapist showed an example of the art product, a colored mask, and then gave the students a template or "pre-drawn mask." Students were given a choice of using crayons, color markers, or colored sticks. The art therapist used hand-over-hand technique, where the adult's hand physically guides the action of the child's, when writing the name of his mask. The mask was titled "Hairy Zombie". After the students colored their masks, they cut the paper with safety scissors. One of the paraprofessionals did hand-over-hand to cut out the mask. Then some of the children stand

¹ A colored elastic substance with a mild odor made from a mixture of glue, warm water, Borax, and food coloring.

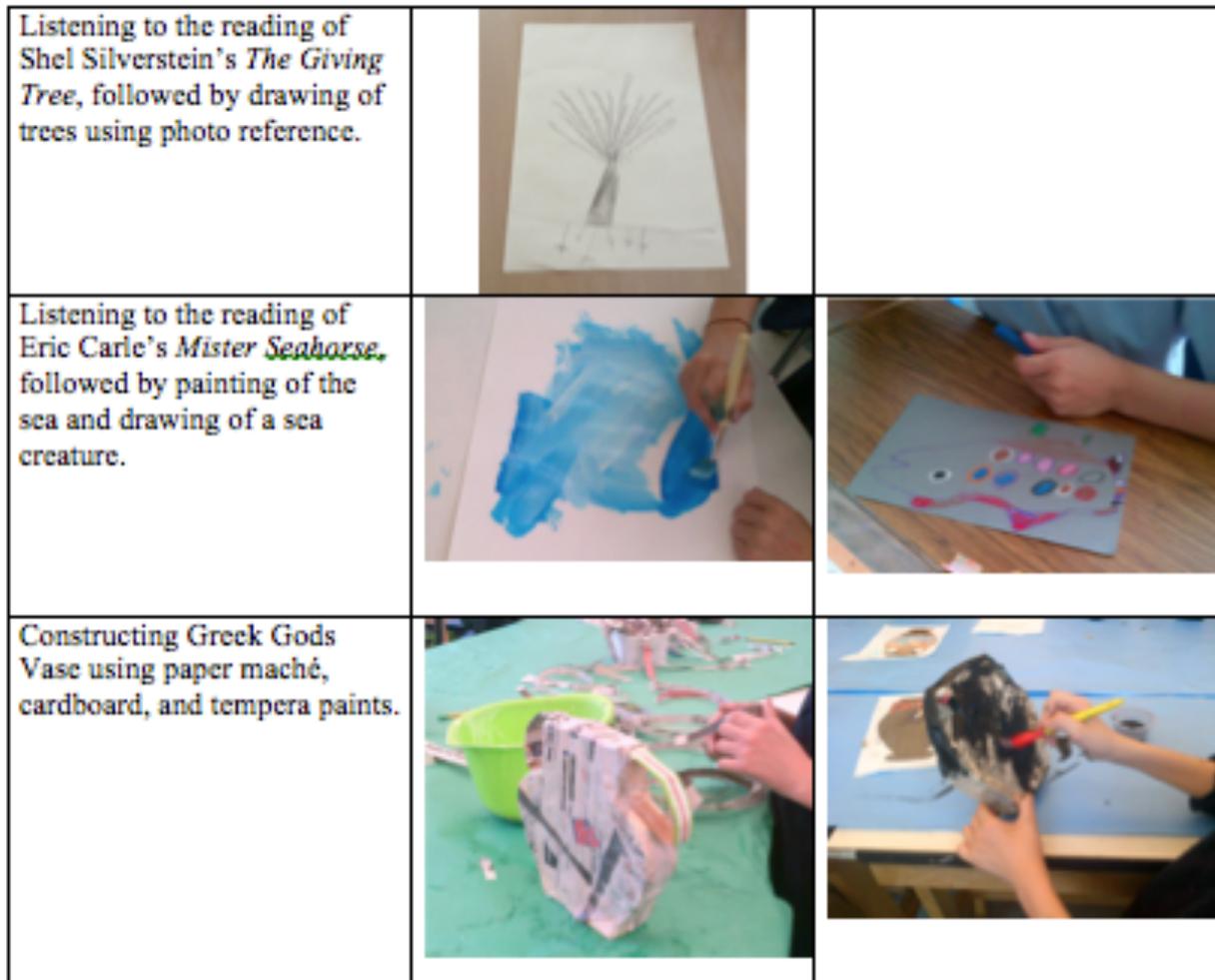


Figure 4. Art Teachers: Students with Autism Working in Inclusion Art Classrooms at Elementary School Level (above and middle) and Middle School Level (below).

up, move around, and make sounds pretending to be imaginary creatures. During an interview with the art therapist, I mention that the imaginary play seems to demonstrate that some students know the purpose of the mask. The art therapist confirms, “You put it on your face.” This later sequence of the class was not planned as part of the lesson. She stated, “[they were] being creative, they were sharing with each other.”

Second Art Therapist.

The second art therapist worked with small groups of the student population at a junior high school for twelve years. Earlier in her career, she provided therapeutic workshops for teachers and students to reduce anxiety and resistance to new changes. These workshops were focused on helping transition and introduce a creative arts therapy program at the

school (Nelson, 2010). During my study she worked with eight boys on the autism spectrum. One student who is non-verbal with poor fine motor skills was assisted by a teacher and a paraprofessional, while the other seven had expressive language. One of the students was making friends with another student in class, an important achievement. The second art therapist said the students were able to “socialize with each other...and experience tactile things that they may not experience otherwise.” She stated “the teachers and the [paraprofessional] are excellent, they know me, they work with me, they’re very involved.” This art therapist works at one large table with chairs. There was natural lighting, a sink, and a sewing machine.

The objectives of the lesson were following verbal directions, listening and engaging in group discussion, giving verbal and affective responses when smelling and feeling a “dream pillow.” The art therapist assisted student learning with participation and focus through redirection and prompting. The lesson I observed was making “dream pillows.” The students gave pillows to their mothers for Mother’s Day and the rest were sold at a local art festival to raise money for the art program. The second art therapist stated, “...we briefly talked about Mother’s Day and bringing [the scented pillows] home...so they can give it to their moms on Sunday.” The lesson involved cutting, sewing with a needle, stuffing the pillow with a scented lavender filling, and then decorating the exterior of the pillow. She elaborated about the filling, “it was a really nice sensory experience.” The second art therapist used shaping or “hand-over-hand,” “modeling,” chaining or “step-by-step,” the secondary reinforcer of praise, and rewards. She stated “encouraging them throughout helps give them more confidence” and also reinforces their learning.

This lesson encouraged olfactory and tactile learning. The pillows had a lavender scent with a “calming” effect and the sewing encouraged a soothing repetitive motion. Students were encouraged to “call out” to share accomplishments or receive further instruction. Once given a directive, they were encouraged to make choices so they could be “independent.” The art therapist explained, “Let me just throw that out as a directive, and if they can do it, fine, and if not, that’s fine.”

The art therapist gave individual attention during the art process. The paraprofessional did hand-over-hand with the only non-verbal student who had poor fine motor skills. The art therapist praised² the students for their accomplishments to try and increase their self-confidence. She explained, “...he’s going to have to make choice in here...to help build up his independent skills. Students also demonstrate self-directives such as when a student turns on soft “cheerful” music. The art therapist stated, “The auditory component really added

² Praise is a verbal comment by an adult stated when a student’s target behavior was achieved.

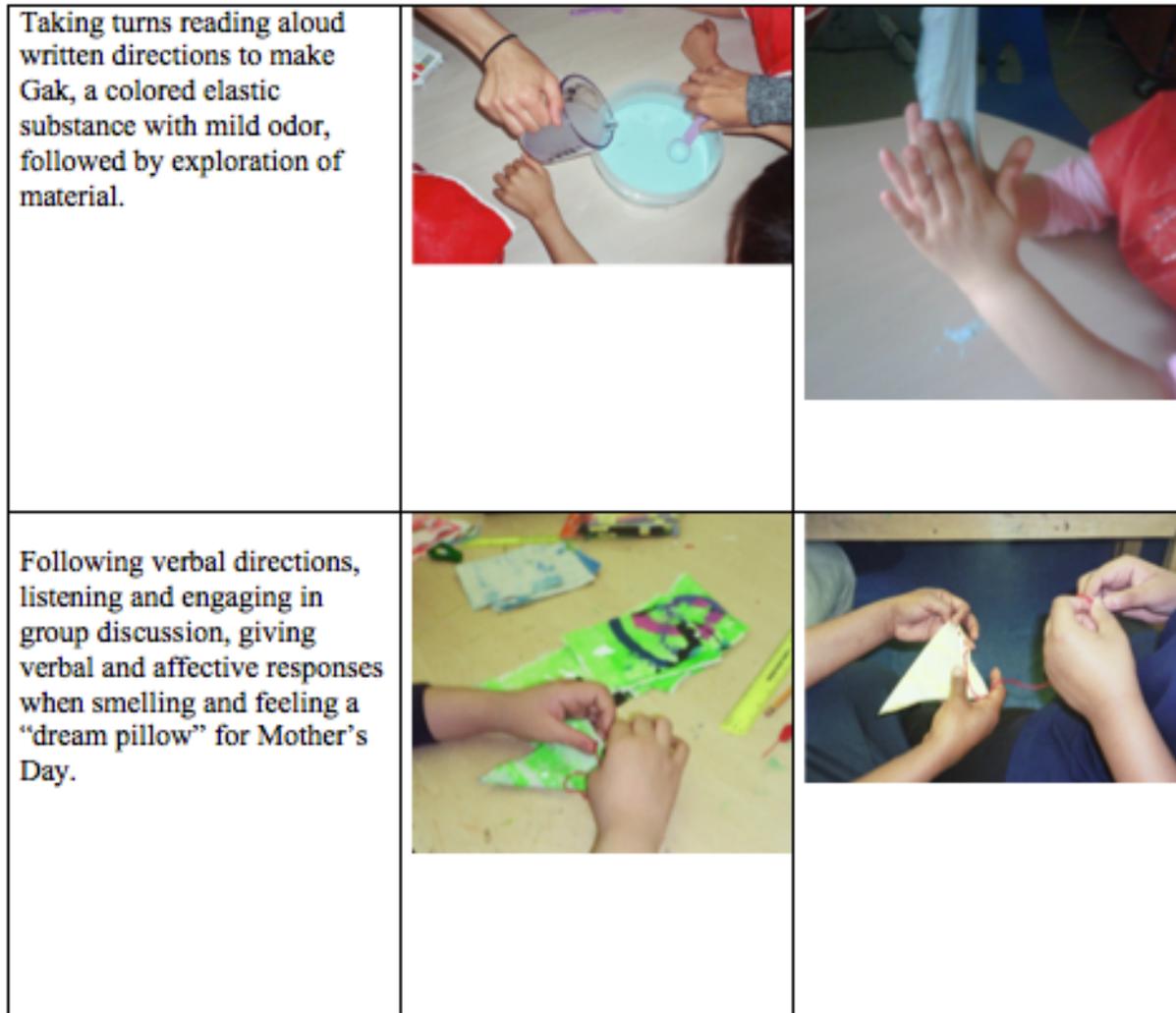


Figure 5. Art Therapists: Students with Autism Working in Self-Contained Classrooms at Elementary School Level (above and middle) and Middle School Level (below).

something and it was really nice that he initiated that...it is encouraging his independence and choice making."

First Art Teacher.

The first art teacher worked with students from Pre-K to 2nd grade in an elementary school. She regularly attended staff development that was unique for this school population. She explained the purpose of staff development was to "improve our interaction with and engagement of our autistic students." I observed her teaching an inclusion art class with one student on the autism spectrum. She said, "I'm the one that's had to change." She made accommodations for the objectives of lessons. She stated, "...in an inclusion room I really don't have the expectation of product. I really try to go into an exploration of experience of some sort and so it was a totally different shift in mind..." When asked about working

relationships with art therapists she said, “I’m very open to the way art therapists work in terms of their social and emotional goals.”

I observed her teaching art to first grade students. The large classroom had natural lighting and a sink nearby. There were about twenty students. They worked at small individual tables. They were next to and across from each other forming a large flat surface for communal learning. This allowed students to see what others were doing and encouraged informal conversations. There were no paraprofessionals and no regular teachers who assisted with the art lesson. The objective of her written lesson about drawing trees was to participate in a “read aloud”³ of *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein. They discussed the importance of trees to people and then drew trees using photo references. The art teacher read a story that was “developmentally appropriate.” The story, she explained, was not just intellectually appropriate but emotionally appropriate.” She explained that it was “spring time” and “a kind of feeling of transformation was happening that they can relate to.” She elaborated, “some of the [students] were talking about their trees...and that’s because their drawings are still their own...”

There was also a “read aloud” of Eric Carle’s book, *Mr. Seahorse*. The objective of her written lesson about sea creatures was to explore creating tints, exploring long and short brush strokes, and covering the paper with paint from edge to edge. For differentiation, she performed hand-over-hand or modeling on a one-on-one basis (See Figure 3). During cleanup time, many students were in line to use the sink and the teacher had to discipline some students for cutting in line. There was one student on the autism spectrum who was able “to work at a high level.” The art teacher said he did not have a preferred art material or subject matter. She explained, “he’s pretty open to what’s being presented to him, he’s flexible.” She is not aware of whether he also makes art at home.

A pre-k boy with autism from a self-contained classroom was mainstreamed in first grade to the inclusion classroom. The art teacher stated this student was becoming more “independent” and “emotionally balanced” with few tantrums. She explained, he’s “shown a lot of growth out of a self-contained room between this year and last year.” This student was able to take direction and complete the art lesson with some one-on-one instruction. The art teacher commented as he was drawing trees, “I see ...roots growing down from your tree.” Another time she said, “There you go...look at those long branches.” The art teacher explained, “I don’t like to touch the children’s artwork myself but I have done so a few times if [he] was really struggling with the lesson and helping him make just a couple of lines and then letting him go on his own.” When asked about this student the art teacher

³ “Read aloud” is a strategy in which a teacher reads orally to students on a consistent basis from texts above their independent reading level but at their listening level.

commented, “I probably could have sat with him a little bit...he repeated one type of line [from branches] and cropped it...as opposed to this type of variety...but in a regular [education] room with twenty plus children I usually feel obligated to just move around, there are so many things happening.” She explained further, “my job as an art teacher is to present to the students the elements of the art to learn” and it is “very important to me to have some choice and variety and ownership of their work...that they feel it’s ok to be different.”

During the lessons I observed she did not do shaping, or hand-over-hand. She did engage in modeling “where I’d draw on my own paper.” Additionally, she tended to teach with chaining, or explain the whole lesson step-by-step in divided sections making it easier for the student to perform a sequence of desired complex behavior without becoming overwhelmed with too much information at once. She praised students frequently saying things like, “I love the way the blue table is working quietly.” She tried to not pass judgment about their work, explaining, “I try to avoid that...I try to use ‘I love that you’ve used three different types of lines to draw your [tree] branches.” When asked about the rewards or intrinsic ways she reinforced socially appropriate behavior, she explained “art is the reward.” She referred to “choice time,” if a student was finished with the lesson before the 45 minutes class time was over.

Second Art Teacher.

The second art teacher taught an inclusion class of twenty-three eighth graders, I observed this class three times. The second art teacher said she and the second art therapist attended “district workshops and professional development.” This class had gifted and talented art students, in addition to three students with autism. The students with autism who were mainstreamed were also in the self-contained class with the second art therapist. The second art teacher explained, “the inclusion art class allowed the autistic child to feel included in a large group setting of regular education class students...” There were several large tables with chairs and there were no paraprofessionals or other teachers present.

The lesson called “Greek Gods Vase” was about making an ancient Greek vase (see Figure 4). The objective of the lesson was for students to learn about the life and art of the ancient Greeks by focusing on pottery. There was a concept board with the written terms “patterns” and “rhythm”. There were also visual images elaborating on the ancient Greek vase lesson. The students had to make a sketch of their vase, cut out the drawing, and make a 3-d paper maché vase. One student with autism, who demonstrated self-stimulatory behavior, was interested in drawing with a specific personal pencil. This was the first year he was in this inclusion class. The second art teacher explained, “If I give him a piece of paper, he loves to just draw...He’s a wonderful student. He seems to work well with others...” She adds that he

will come into the classroom and declare, “I’m a wonderful artist.” This student also made art at home, had a sketchbook, and participated in the urban art group at the school.

Another student with autism, who does not make art at home, does not prefer art. Despite his preference, he is cooperative during class time. The art teacher elaborates, “[he] does it because he knows he needs to complete it...he’s cooperative...he was enjoying the process of it, the cutting and the pasting.” He was able to process the art teacher’s directions. She explained, “He likes to stop and think about what’s he’s going to do next...he completes his assignments on time...he stops for a purpose, to get his collective thoughts.” She said he is more confident of his verbal skills than his written. He made a sketch that was imaginative in color choices, detail, and lines when compared to the exemplar provided. When beginning the application of the wet paper maché on the cardboard vase the art teacher did some modeling and shaping, or physically guiding the action of the student’s hand, to help him because he was having difficulty. She explained the motion was “like putting a band-aid on.” Another student was having difficulty taping together the cardboard vase. She asked, “Do you want me to hold it?” and he responded, “Yeah.” She spent class time giving verbal directives and supporting their efforts. She praised their accomplishments. This art teacher also moved around from one table to another to answer questions and assist those needing additional support. It is worth noting that non-disabled students were encouraged to be respectful of the different learning styles of students with autism.

<p>1st Art Therapist: “...I sit at the table and shake hands with everyone, so then I want them to have eye contact with me, I want them to remember my name, and I want them to either say, ‘How are you?’ or to respond to me when I ask them how they are. Because some of them will look away or they don’t remember my name.”</p>	<p>2nd Art Therapist: “Let me just throw that out as a directive, and if they can do it, fine, and if not, that’s fine.”</p>
<p>1st Art Teacher: “I’m the one that’s had to change...in an inclusion room I really don’t have the expectation of product. I really try to go into an exploration of experience of some sort and so it was a totally different shift in mind...”</p>	<p>2nd Art Teacher: “...[he] does it because he knows he needs to complete it...he’s cooperative...he was enjoying the process of it, the cutting and the pasting...he likes to stop and think about what he’s going to do next...he completes his assignments on time...he stops for a purpose, to get his collective thoughts.”</p>

Figure 6. Art Teachers and Art Therapists Interview Responses (Excerpts)

Analysis

This study emphasizes the physical behaviors and verbal communications of art teachers and art therapists with students on the autism spectrum in inclusive and self-contained classes (figures 7 and 8). The four art professionals use a student-centered learning approach where they acted as facilitators addressing the distinct learning needs, interests, and cultural backgrounds of students by modifying assignments and instructional strategies in the classroom. The teachers and therapists provided choice, encouraged informal learning, ensured social communication, and enhanced creativity for their students. Art teachers and art therapists are reflective upon their teaching experiences. They produce a supportive learning environment for their students. They have positive attitudes toward their students' learning potential. They make constructive comments during the lessons. Self-motivation of

Art Teachers	Art Therapists
Art teachers worked alone.	Art therapists worked with regular teachers and paraprofessionals.
Art teachers taught large class sizes (20 students / 23 students).	Art therapists taught small class sizes (6 students / 8 students).
Art teachers taught inclusion classes (regular students and students with autism).	Art therapists taught self-contained classes (students with disabilities only).
Art teachers taught with a focus on art process, following directions, and working independently.	Art therapists taught students with a focus on collaborative learning and developing social communication skills such as taking turns, sharing, and following directions.
Discipline was enforced.	Discipline was not enforced.
Art teachers walked around classroom.	Art therapists sat at table.

Figure 7. Teaching Strategy Differences

the students plays a role in their overall performance.

With the art therapists, discipline was not strictly enforced; for example, “calling out” is tolerated as a sign of affirming self in relation to others. There was fluidity in terms of how the students interpreted the lesson objectives. Students shared feelings, ideas, and experiences and acknowledged different viewpoints. Routine was consistent in terms of art

procedure, setting, and individuals who participated. Choice and praise increased students' confidence. Behavior techniques were frequently and consistently used that reinforced positive and constructive social behavior. In general, the art therapists conditioned socially appropriate behavior such as self-regulation, to increase the probability of a few students with autism to be mainstreamed in the inclusive art classrooms.

The art teachers and art therapists worked well together to develop group cohesion. In terms of professional support in the classroom, art therapists had assistance from general teachers and paraprofessionals. In contrast, art teachers worked alone. In terms of class size, art teachers worked with larger classes, whereas art therapists worked in small groups. Both art teachers and art therapists had different objectives and goals for students at the elementary and middle school levels. Many of the objectives addressed the reduction either of the major characteristics of diagnosis or possible symptoms of autism. These objectives increased the chance of students with autism to reduce negative social behavior. Students with autism demonstrated the ability to learn in and through the arts. This occurred frequently with the directives of art teachers and art therapists in the school setting.

Conclusion

In this section, I identify successful teaching strategies for this special needs population of art students. The major characteristic of the teaching style can be described as responsive and constructive when working with this special needs population with a different learning style. I determine the presence of a mutually beneficial relationship in terms of collaboration that developed group cohesion. Successful teaching techniques and strategies

Art Teachers and Art Therapists

Both had positive attitudes toward their students' learning potential.

Both made constructive comments during lessons.

Both ensured a supportive learning environment for their students.

Both were reflective on their teaching experiences in the classroom.

Both used behavior modification techniques consistently and frequently to reinforce positive and constructive social behavior.

Routine was consistent in terms of procedures, setting, and individuals.

Students shared feelings, ideas, and experiences and different viewpoints.

Figure 8. Teaching Strategy Similarities

can be defined as the result of a pedagogy of collaborative leadership in teaching art to students on the autism spectrum. Further, I see this group study as helpful in building support for my theory of EVR (Furniss, 2008b). I described in greatest detail the teaching

strategies of the first art therapist because early intervention is critical in altering the life achievements of individuals with autism (Cohen, 2006). In short, mainstreamed students with autism spectrum disorder who demonstrate self-regulatory behavior benefit from sharing an enriched learning environment with typically developing students who initiate frequent social interaction.

Critical Implications

One teaching strategy that seems especially effective is combining behavior modification techniques with interpersonal relationships. There is not a strict template for how to teach art to children with ASD, but rather I hope to provide a flexible guide that supports the unique interests, talents, and skills of these artists. This form of intervention consistently supports their art process as a fluid and dynamic creative pathway of learning through the visual arts. This intensive social environment ensured a successful artistic experience where learning in the visual arts occurred over time. This experience had all the depth, layering, and complexity art can provide to creative autistic minds (Furniss, 2008b). Since my research study involved art facilitators who are females, possible future research studies could compare teaching styles of male and female professionals to determine whether gender is a factor during interactions with students on the autism spectrum.

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About the Author



Gillian Furniss is an art educator and visual artist. Her mission is for all children to have access to a studio art experience so they can learn in the visual arts. She is committed to teaching art to at-risk multicultural children, training teachers to work in inclusive art classrooms in schools and community art organizations, and advocating for the visual arts as a site of learning. She teaches art and art education courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels. She taught studio art to multicultural urban children at community centers and supervised student art teachers in public schools. She writes about issues and research concerning art education and art therapy. Furniss presents at local, national, and international conferences. She exhibits her artwork (printmaking, papercutting, and photography) in solo and group shows.