

**THE HANDBOOK OF
SCHOOL ART THERAPY**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Janet Bush, A.T.R.-BC, started art therapy as a pilot program in the Dade County Public Schools, Miami, Florida, and soon demonstrated the potential value of an art therapy approach. She is presently serving as Department Chairperson in the Division of Exceptional Student Education, where she directs a program with twenty master art therapists who provide services for over 400 emotionally disturbed Dade County students.

Ms. Bush began her career as an art educator, having received a B.A. degree in art from Ohio State University. Graduate art therapy studies at Hahnemann Medical University, in Philadelphia, led her to work in a public school setting and to spawn the idea of applying art therapy in the public schools.

Her model program for the public schools made a major contribution to the field of art therapy, and was recognized by the American Art Therapy Association. She subsequently received a Distinguished Service Award for her clinical work with children.

Ms. Bush is a registered, board certified, practicing clinical art psychotherapist, a founding member of the Florida Art Therapy Association, a university instructor, and a nationally known speaker and lecturer on art therapy in the schools. She has authored a number of articles, and has served as a consultant in many clinical and educational settings. In the Dade County Public Schools, she has successfully launched the first full art therapy program in a public school setting in the country, and her pioneering work has energized the practice of art therapy in public schools nationwide.

THE HANDBOOK OF SCHOOL ART THERAPY

Introducing Art Therapy Into A School System

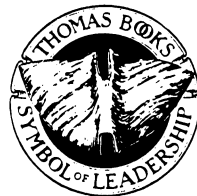
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*In memory of my parents
Louis and Elva Bush*

FOREWORD

This book transcends the concept evoked by the term “handbook.” It is a comprehensive work describing the day-to-day, hands-on experience of Janet Bush as she struggled to bring art therapy into the public school system.

The outline of her image begins to emerge in the Preface and Introduction. She rightly points out that the traditional purpose of schools was to teach children knowledge. And if they did not learn, it was not within the province of the educator in the school system to deal with the matter.

As an art educator, Ms. Bush, like so many others, began to recognize the indicators of cognitive and emotional problems surfacing in the artwork of some of her students. She describes how this growing awareness led to her initial interest in art therapy and how it became the catalyst for forging the new frontier. She carefully pursued a graduate degree in art therapy, at that time, a nascent field. Innovatively, she tested her inclination by requesting clinical placement in a public school setting, then based her thesis on her experience: She focused on being available to work with children who could not remain in the classroom. Armed with the success and the confidence she had gained, she methodically set the stage for what would become years of an uphill battle.

In the very first chapter, Ms. Bush succinctly lays out the rationale for introducing art therapy into the school system, then spells out the delivery of art therapy services as she encompasses consultation, assessment and intervention, professional development, research, and program planning and evaluation. She makes a cogent point that the addition of a registered art therapist within the school setting is critical to the fulfillment of the federal mandate, passed in 1975, to mainstream all disabled children.

Her history of art therapy in the schools is well documented and serves as a basis for further appreciation of this book. There was only one other program in the country when Ms. Bush proposed her pilot pro-

gram to introduce art therapy into the Dade County Public School System. She describes her proposal, its implementation, and the response from school administrators and faculty at its completion. New doors were opened and her work continued.

She helps the reader to understand the many facets of her self-determined task. Ms. Bush makes it very clear that as the structure and needs of education shift and change, the art therapist must be prepared to meet the challenges and must work to become an integral part of the education of our children, in conjunction, both, with their cognitive and emotional parameters.

In detailing her own progression in the development of the Art Therapy Program at the Dade County Public School System, she covers every aspect of the utilization of art therapy and the role of art therapists in the school. Her comprehensive discussion and her evaluation of the pilot program are extremely useful for art therapists, teachers, and parents. They can serve as a guide to understanding the many problems inherent in introducing a new approach to a traditional setting. For those who would replicate her model, she offers her experience and the hard-earned knowledge she has acquired through such intervening areas as hiring art therapists, the physical environment, public relations, and strategies for funding.

Ms. Bush started as an army of one, fought a battle, and clearly emerged the victor. There are now 20 art therapists employed in the art therapy program she directs. But it is obvious that she is not satisfied. She challenges art therapists, school teachers, administrators, and parents to share in the effort. There is a legitimate inducement for joining her team as she points to the speed with which the world moves forward, and the snail's pace at which traditional educational settings proceed, which makes them appear to be standing still. There is also a challenge to educators of art teachers and art therapists. She correctly points out the paucity of trained specialists, and emphasizes the fact that trained specialists are needed to serve the growing numbers of identified populations with special needs.

The art therapy program directed by Ms. Bush in the Dade County Public School System is the only one of its kind—and it is a model for the country. She has indeed provided a “handbook” of information for teachers sensitive to their students’ needs, parents concerned about their children, art therapists who want to work in a school system, and

educators who guide teachers and art therapists. I am sure they will all want to keep the knowledge she has been able to amass close at hand.

MYRA F. LEVICK

PREFACE

This volume is a handbook for clinicians and educators, and for concerned parents everywhere who are seeking nontraditional intervention methods for the thousands of children and adolescents who need to overcome emotional interference with their cognitive and emotional progress. The physical, organic, developmental, environmental, social, and emotional conditions that afflict students have not been effectively countered heretofore because the traditional methods of verbal counseling and assessment have not met their total needs. Art therapy is a nontraditional intervention method designed to bridge the gap between the information acquired about children by educators and the observations made about children's problems by such school clinicians as counselors and psychologists.

Educators apply cognitive standards to help children reach their academic potential. They do not normally assist children with mental health intervention. Counselors assist children in the area of mental health, but with a verbal modality. School psychologists are generally involved with the testing and placement of children who have special needs. The art therapist relates to all of these professionals and their tailored intervention methods and to all of these children, then seeks, by a combined verbal and visual approach and the application of diagnostic and prescriptive methods, to access the inner feelings of the children. The children reveal their personal worries to the art therapist through their artwork. The art therapist is able to assess their emotional damage and to institute remediation measures. With one approach, an art therapist can capture both the cognitive and emotional responses of a student, and can produce the feedback sought by a school treatment team.

This handbook on school art therapy stems from the years of work conducted by the School Art Therapy Program of the Dade County Public Schools, Miami, Florida, where art therapy services have been a regular part of the educational program for students since 1979. The program is funded through monies appropriated for exceptional students.

The handbook provides a comprehensive treatment of the body of knowledge on which art therapy was founded and on which it continues to grow and will perhaps shape the future profession. It is intended as a single source of information on the profession's current challenges. Chapters range from discussions on theory and development to discussions on the nuts and bolts of daily practice. The hope is that it will become a major reference work which practicing art therapists, educators, and school mental health personnel can consult for practical suggestions.

If this handbook has a major theme, it is that the profession of art therapy has evolved to encompass a wide range of applications. Although the specialty was traditionally a part of medical intervention for psychiatric patients, its horizons have expanded. In school settings, it has dealt with the so-called normal youngster, with the disabled youngster, and with the youngster experiencing emotional problems. The handbook reflects the growing sophistication of the profession of art therapy and its interface with other fields—particularly, the education field. Art therapy in the schools represents new ideas, healthy controversy, and fresh challenges.

The book is divided into sixteen chapters, each devoted to a major facet of the practice of art therapy in a school setting. The material will no doubt be revised in the years to come because the practice of art therapy is in a state of evolution, and its application to school settings will continue to change as refined approaches replace old ideas. Perhaps some day there will be art therapists in every school, public and private, in which case, traditional education will have been enriched by the need to suit the times.

The completion of this handbook would not have been possible without the wide-ranging encouragement I have received from many people. I want to thank my friend Lori La Medica for her patience, support, and objective review; chapter contributors, Sarah Hite, Jennifer Lombroia, and Linda Jo Pfeiffer, each of whom offered knowledge, ideas, and fresh approaches; and Don Jones and Myra Levick, who provided me with the requisite training needed to work successfully in this field—they encouraged my dreams, taught me the body of knowledge needed to achieve success, and led me to continually ask questions. Myra Levick has also served as my consultant and mentor through the years, providing me with invaluable support and reinforcing my professional capabilities. Her pioneering work in the field of art therapy has been a solid foundation for the work I have undertaken. I acknowledge,

too, the help of Sylvia Shubert, who has worked with me to put this material in final form; and of Will Gordillo, Director, Ronald Felton, Executive Director, and Terri Reynolds, Assistant Superintendent, Office of Exceptional Student Education, Dade County Public Schools, who have contributed in large measure to the growth of art therapy in the Miami public school district through their recognition of its value in the lives of a considerable number of children. In conclusion, I cannot fail to express my appreciation to the person in the Dade County Public School System who encouraged me to introduce art therapy in the schools and to continue its implementation—Jacqueline Hinchey-Sipes—whose foresight and dedication to all children enabled art therapy to find a place in the Dade County public schools; and to the many art therapists who have worked with me through the years in Dade County and elsewhere, who believe, as I do, that children deserve the best. My parents would have appreciated my contribution to the profession of art therapy, and I embrace their memory as a guiding light in my work.

I will always appreciate the peace and serenity I experienced while writing this book on the enchanting island of Nantucket, Massachusetts.

Although this book is related to my work in the Dade County Public Schools, I have written it in my private capacity. I do not claim official support or endorsement from the Dade County Public Schools or from the State of Florida Department of Education

JANET BUSH

INTRODUCTION

I had lunch with a former staff member who was visiting from out of town. Over sandwiches, we updated each other on our lives. It was not long before the topic of art therapy came up. Maryann was living in a small Florida town where she was working as an art teacher in three public school settings. Even though she is a registered art therapist, she could not perform art therapy services in her schools because public schools were not funded for such work.

Obviously, the town and its public schools saw meeting conventional education standards as their priority. Maryann had the necessary credentials to work as an art teacher. The State of Florida Art Education teaching certification she held guaranteed her eligibility for art instruction. Maryann was hired to teach 25 art classes a week.

Although Maryann had been able to get her foot in the door of the town's public schools, she had not been able to do much more than wiggle her toes. She had spent three long years pursuing public relations activities and inservice education programs with the thought of promoting interest in art therapy. She was now intent on finding other means of establishing art therapy in her school district.

We discussed various funding strategies and ways to implement services, and I believe Maryann left our luncheon with a bit more confidence and enthusiasm than she had arrived with. She knew that what I had suggested was possible, since when I came to the Dade County Public Schools as a registered art therapist with an art education background, in 1976, school personnel had no idea what the potential for art therapy was. Yet today, there are twenty full-time art therapists employed in over 28 Dade County public schools. The strategies I had offered Maryann were based on the tried-and-true techniques implemented in the Dade County school district through the years.

This book has been designed to help individuals like Maryann introduce the principles of art therapy and implement the techniques needed in school settings, but with the understanding and caution that art

therapy in the schools is in the process of “blazing” its trail. It should not be used as art education in an academic sense, nor should it serve as a substitute for counseling or school psychological services. Each field is a separate entity, and has a valid radius of operation. The fields are not interchangeable and are inadequate as replacements for each other. Art therapy utilizes philosophical bases and selected strategies from the other disciplines to extract innermost expressions from students, but its express purpose is to induce results that are compatible with its specialized corrective mission. Youngsters with special needs may, in fact, need to have all of the services offered—art therapy, art education for academic purposes, counseling, and school psychological services.

When holding on to a rip cord, a fall back position carries a price. The need is to go forward, to pull the rip cord, and to engage in a free fall to a tried though new form of learning. Countless numbers of children have gone unassisted through the years because art therapy was not in a position to pull the rip cord. I believe we have now managed to reach a significant moment of change, and that in the future we will be able to benefit all children in school through the establishment of art therapy as a specialized, unalloyed support service.

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Chapter 1

RATIONALE FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF ART THERAPY IN SCHOOLS

Art therapy was traditionally the province of hospitals and mental health centers. The Dade County Public Schools recognized the strengths and advantages that could accrue from the use of art therapy to stem a variety of unacceptable behaviors. In its consistent effort to put students with problems on the right path in their studies, it introduced a pilot art therapy program in the 1979–80 school year.

It has since confirmed that art therapists are unique in the work they perform with students because they combine the attention they give to the verbal communications of the students with the special attention they pay to the nonverbal communications of the students, and they personalize their contact with the students. They are specially equipped to explore the personal problems of the children and the potential revealed by individual children, and then to develop pathways for learning that are not feasible with traditional methods of instruction. Art therapists are qualified to observe and analyze behavior, art products, and student communications, to make diagnostic assessments, and to formulate treatment plans that provide total art therapy coverage. They are not only prepared to deal with the students assigned to them as part of their regular workload, they are capable of taking on random diagnostic work and treatment when called upon to assess students referred to them from a variety of districtwide programs. They are, in addition, qualified to conduct inservice workshops for art and exceptional education teachers, and for psychologists, counselors, and administrators.

Art therapists utilize art products and individual associations with art products to help generate physical, emotional, and learning skills that can foster compatible relationships between students and their inner and outer worlds. Students in art therapy who come to an improved understanding of their problems may even be helped, through art

experiences, to resolve their problems. By gaining new understanding of themselves, they learn to face their conflicts.

An apt analogy might picture them as facing life as they would face a blank art canvas: seizing the opportunity to rework maladjusted patterns into creative adaptive patterns. By likening themselves to artists who can repaint canvasses they do not like after the paint is dry, they can, in a sense, learn to paint over their problems to attain new solutions. The way they face the canvas can become a metaphor for the way they face life.

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL ART THERAPY SERVICES DELIVERY

The duties of school art therapists are as broad as the ensuing description is long: School art therapists provide a range of services for students, direct and indirect, which require involvement with the entire educational system—students, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel; families, surrogate caretakers, community and regional agencies; resources that support the educational process; the organizational, physical, temporal, and curricular variables that play major roles within the system; and a variety of other factors that may be important on an individual basis. The intent of these services is to promote mental health and to facilitate learning.

Comprehensive school art therapy activities complement one another, and are therefore most accurately viewed as an integrated and coordinated whole rather than as discrete services. However, to promote an indepth understanding of them, I have listed and described them separately under the following categories:

Consultation

- Collaboration on mental health and behavioral and educational concerns is recurrent with school personnel, and with parents and outside people when consultation is merited.
- Inservice and other skill enhancement activities are provided for school personnel, for parents, and for others in the community on learning, development, and behavior.
- Collaborative relationships are developed with the students themselves to involve them in the assessment, intervention, and program evaluation procedures.

Assessment

- Assessment practices are utilized that increase the likelihood of effective educational intervention and followup.
- Assessment reports become a permanent part of a student's records.
- The assessment instruments used have established reliability and validity for the intended purpose and population.
- Nonbiased assessment techniques help to maximize student achievement and educational success.

Intervention

- Direct and indirect interventions are provided to help the students function.
- Programs are designed to enhance cognitive, emotional, social, and vocational development.
- Assistance is given to school personnel, to personnel at community agencies, and to parents, consisting of, but not limited to, inservice training, organization, development, program planning and evaluation, parent counseling, and parent education.

Professional Training and Development

- Professional training and development are accomplished by means of a continuing professional development program. Release time and financial support to cover meeting fees are provided by the school or school district.
- Peer review is incorporated for mutual assistance and self-examination.
- The supervision of all school art therapists is sufficient to ensure accountable services.
- A coordinated plan for accountability and evaluation of all services is implemented and revised as needed.

Research

- School art therapists design, conduct, and document their own research. They also make use of the general body of professional research. Both the applied and the basic research focus on the psychological and artistic functioning of human beings, on art therapy assessment tools and procedures, and on art therapy treatment and techniques.