ART THERAPY WITH STUDENTS AT RISK

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stella A. Stepney, M. S., ATR-BC, LCAT is a Board Certified, Registered Art Therapist. She is licensed by New York State as a Creative Arts Therapist and holds a New York State Permanent Teacher Certification in Art Education. Ms. Stepney obtained a B. A. degree in Art Therapy from St. Thomas Aquinas College in Sparkill, NY and a M. S. degree in Art Therapy from Nazareth College in Rochester, NY. She is a recipient of the "Award for Excellence in Art Therapy" from Nazareth College. Ms. Stepney is on the faculty of Nazareth College. She teaches graduate courses in the Creative Arts Therapy Department, School of Health and Human Services.

Ms. Stepney is the author of *Art Therapy With Students At Risk: Introducing Art Therapy into an Alternative Learning Environment for Adolescents.* Since the publication of the book, Ms. Stepney has had the opportunity to advance her research and work with diverse at-risk student populations. She has consistently found that the application of therapeutic art experiences, in a safe and supportive environment, fosters resilience, facilitates creative growth, and enhances cognitive, emotional, and social growth. Ms. Stepney has presented locally and nationally on the topic "Art Therapy With Students At Risk." She strongly advocates that art therapy and public school education in both traditional and nontraditional learning environments can form successful partnerships.

Ms. Stepney worked as a primary therapist at Crestwood Children's Center in Rochester, NY. Crestwood offers a continuum of services from primary prevention within the community to intensive, campus-based treatment to promote the growth and development of children and families. Crestwood is an affiliate of Hillside Families of Agencies, which is the leading provider of human services for at-risk children, youth, and their families in Western and Central New York. Ms. Stepney has extensive experience in using creative arts therapy with children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances, behavioral challenges, and mental disorders.

Sojourner House for Women in Rochester, NY is a nonprofit organization that provides housing and supportive services for women and their children who have experienced an economic, emotional, family, or housing crisis. Dreamseeds is a program that enables the children and adolescents of Sojourner House to take advantage of cultural and educational activities in the Rochester area. Ms. Stepney developed the visual arts component of Dreamseeds, "Creative Art: Growth Through Self-Expression." As a primary prevention initiative, Creative Art offers children and adolescents opportunities to explore personal problems and potentials coupled with the enhancement of cognitive, emotional, and social growth. Ms. Stepney also served on the Sojourner House Board of Directors.

Ms. Stepney is a member of the American Art Therapy Association (AATA). She chaired the Distance Learning Committee and the Multicultural Committee for the organization. Ms. Stepney is a member of the American Counseling Association (ACA) and two of its affiliate divisions, the Association for Creativity in Counseling (ACC) and the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD). She is a member of the 15 in 5 Campaign Network of the America's Promise Alliance. Ms. Stepney is in private practice. She resides with her husband, Harold, in Fairport, New York. They have an adult son, Terence.

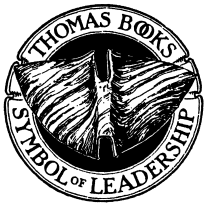
Second Edition

ART THERAPY WITH STUDENTS AT RISK

Fostering Resilience and Growth Through Self-Expression

By

STELLA A. STEPNEY, M.S., ATR-BC, LCAT



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To my husband, Harold, and our son, Terence
for your
love, support, and encouragement.

"The fruit of righteousness will be peace;
the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever."
Isaiah 32:17
NIV

FOREWORD

It is a privilege to write a Foreword for Stella Stepney's revision of her 2001 book, *Art Therapy With Students At Risk*. I had told Stella when I first discovered her work that I liked it a great deal, partly because it is about School Art Therapy, an area that has not been sufficiently developed. However, there are even more personal reasons, which became ever more apparent to me as I read this new edition.

First, it is like coming home professionally, since I began my own career in the late fifties as an art teacher, stumbling accidentally onto the field of art therapy in the early sixties. Art therapy made sense to me, because as an art teacher I was influenced by Viktor Lowenfeld's (1957) ideas about the psychological value of creative activity. Although his concept of a "therapeutic art education" was developed during his early work with blind children (Lowenfeld, 1939), Lowenfeld's whole orientation to teaching emphasized growth in what he called the child's "self-identification" with his work.

When he first came to the United States as a refugee from the Nazis, Lowenfeld taught Art at a historically black college, Hampton Institute, where he encouraged the students to create in ways that reflected the culture in which they were born and raised (Cheatle et al., 2000; Edgcomb, 1993). This was consistent with his deeply respectful philosophy of art education, where the personhood of the student was primary.

Even more strongly than in the first edition of this book, Stella Stepney's approach to art therapy with disadvantaged youth echoes the values that Lowenfeld held dear and that I find compatible. Perhaps because like Lowenfeld I am a Jew, I could identify with the persecution felt by my black classmates in high school, where I joined the Youth Group of the NAACP. During the summer of 1968 after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, I organized a Freedom School in

Pittsburgh with a group of colleagues, most of whom were creative arts therapists or teachers. As Cliff Joseph (1974) noted, socially concerned artists are also humanly concerned artists; hence the many art therapists for whom individual dignity matters in both the clinic and the community.

Stella Stepney's way of thinking and writing about work with discouraged adolescents emphasizes the centrality of social and environmental causes for problems in school, and the need to help students who have had negative experiences to think more positively about themselves, to have pride and dignity. Like Viktor Lowenfeld, she rejects the idea that any student should allow themselves to be identified by the institution's or society's perception of them. Rather, she believes that they deserve support and encouragement to find and to develop the strengths within themselves.

Although the author's recommendations for art therapy with disadvantaged youth are made in a context of the relevance of symbolic avenues of expression; they are also linked to the social fabric within which problems emerge. In addition to reminding the reader of the importance of alternative forms of education, Stepney's updated text includes recent research on resiliency, cognition, neuroscience, and new models for "reclaiming" which is different from "rehabilitating" troubled youth. With her way of reframing the sources and solutions for the problems of youngsters at risk, which is as much sociological as it is psychological, Stepney has added an important and neglected dimension to the art therapy literature.

A similar subtle but substantive contribution lies not only in the art exercises Stepney has selected, based on ideas from a wide variety of authors; but in her thoughtful modifications designed to help these students to gain the courage they lack in order to see themselves in a productive light. In so doing, she models for the reader an ability to utilize the worthwhile ideas of others, along with a capacity to creatively reshape them in order to better meet the specific needs of those she serves (cf. Ross, 1997).

Finally, as Stepney notes, there is a glaring lack of literature on art therapy in the schools, with only Bush (1997) and Frostig and Essex (1998) devoting entire books to the topic. This lack reflects, I believe, the difficulties of establishing art therapy in the schools of America. There have been many individual instances, but despite the model provided by Bush's establishment of a large Department in the

Schools of Dade County, Florida, the development of art therapy in the schools has been painfully slow in the United States. In Israel, by contrast, perhaps because of the pervasiveness of trauma impacting all students, art therapy in the schools is more widespread (Moriya, 2000).

Hopefully, the current emphasis on wellness and prevention will allow more students, preferably before but certainly after they are deemed "at risk," to have the benefits of art therapy in their educational setting. For any such programs, Stella Stepney's book will be a worthy philosophical and practical guide.

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PREFACE

A metaphor is a form of symbolic speech that is based on analogy: *something is like something else.* It suggests a comparison between two things of different nature that nevertheless have something in common. Artists create metaphors to express feelings. By taking our feelings and finding an object or action that expresses them, we sharpen our understanding of ourselves and can pass that understanding on to other people.

Metaphors used in therapy are symbolic in nature. They provide a powerful means of expressing ideas and feelings that might otherwise remain unspoken, unwritten, or undiscovered. Metaphorically, the concept of a "Garden of Self" composed of healthy plants, weeds, and seeds can be applied to art therapy with students at risk. The growth of these students is being stunted and choked out by academic, behavioral, and social weeds. Academically at-risk students fail to achieve and are predictably dropout prone. Behaviorally at-risk students display inappropriate school behaviors. Socially at-risk students may be faced with disciplinary charges and brought to the attention of the juvenile justice system. Therefore, seeds of encouragement must be planted into the lives of these students, which will enable them to experience success.

Within traditional and nontraditional learning environments, art therapy is a psychoeducational therapeutic intervention that uses the visual arts as primary expressive and communicative channels. The art therapy process allows students to explore personal problems and find ways of making responsible choices. There have been considerable new research findings in the areas of resilience, cognitive science, neuroscience, dropout prevention and school engagement, coupled with new federal and state legislation. In addition, important trends in philosophical and theoretical models have emerged that call for a

"reclaiming" of at-risk youth. This book reflects the research, legislation, and trends that impact the theory and practice of art therapy with diverse at-risk student populations.

The book is divided into seven chapters. It includes fourteen therapeutic techniques that are written in a lesson plan format. The selected techniques provide art experiences to facilitate creative and therapeutic change for students. The fourteen photographic illustrations highlight students' creative responses elicited from the application of the technique.

Chapter 1, "Adolescence," examines the developmental domains of adolescence and adolescents' participation in health risk behaviors. Adolescence is the developmental period between childhood and adulthood. The period is divided into three distinct phases: early adolescence, middle adolescence and late adolescence. The critical developmental domains during adolescence include: physical, cognitive, moral, personality, identity, racial identity, and creative. Adolescents' participation in health risk behaviors is another critical consideration. Adolescence is a period that has always been characterized by challenges. Therefore, each encounter with an adolescent should be viewed as an opportunity to help the adolescent in his or her positive development and to lay the foundation for healthy functioning in adulthood.

Chapter 2, "Alternative Schools," traces the evolution of the alternative schools movement from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to the present. Alternative education has historically served diverse population of students, including those whose family's academic, social, political or religious values diverged from the mainstream, as well as those who were unsuccessful within the regular school system. Freedom Schools emerged during the Freedom Summer of 1964 in Mississippi. Early alternative schools like today's alternative schools represent innovation in terms of their small scale, informal ambience, and departure from bureaucratic rules and procedures. There are three "pure" types of alternatives schools which are characterized by choice, sentencing, and remediation. The goals that continue to drive the establishment of alternative schools and programs include reduction in dropout rates, reduction in student truancy, reduction of disruptive and inattentive students from mainstream institutions into more productive and successful learning environments and re-engagement with learning, coupled with the community

that occurs when students are placed in a more responsive and flexible environment.

Chapter 3, "Alternative Education Programs," explores the catalysts for policymakers to embrace alternative education. America is experiencing a dropout crisis. According to research findings, 30 percent of students will fail to complete high school. Among African American and Hispanic students, the dropout rate is closer to 50 percent. Students from lower-income families are six times more likely to dropout than those from higher-income families. It is increasingly clear that America's future competitiveness and prosperity depends on ensuring that students graduate from high school ready for college or work. There is a need to develop and advance theoretical concepts that treat retention, graduation, and completion as consequences of a dynamic interaction of such variables as student characteristics, school context, occupational prospects, and cultural influences.

Chapter 4, "Emotions and Learning," provides insights into the phenomenology of emotion, the psychobiology of emotion, and the implications of emotion research on learning. Phenomenology posits that behavior is determined by a person's subjective reality. The phenomenology of emotion is discussed in terms of mood and affect. Developments in the cognitive sciences have uncovered how and where the body and brain process emotion. Developments in neuroscience have uncovered how the brain develops from childhood into adolescence and on into early adulthood. Theories of cognitive development describe how learners learn new information and acquire new skills. As evidenced through these advances, a student must be thought of as more than brain tissue and body. Powerful hormones are converting the body and brain into a vibrant life force, fashioning not only the mental and physical components but also the social and emotional components, which encompass the *whole* child that must be educated in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 5, "Art Therapy in the Schools," focuses on the field of school art therapy. Janet Bush is a pioneer and leading advocate for this specialization within the art therapy profession. Bush introduced art therapy into the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) in 1979. For over thirty years, M-DCPS art therapists have been empowering students through creativity. In 2003, the American Art Therapy Association's Publication Committee prepared an updated version of the *Resource Packet for School Art Therapists.* Special thanks were extend-

ed to Bush for lending her "considerable expertise" in order to advise the undertaking. The resource packet provides information and guidelines designed to establish a foundational framework for implementing an art therapy program in an educational environment. "Will art therapy eventually be well established in all school systems and will it serve as one accepted means of addressing student failure in the classroom?" Bush identifies major issues and recommends ways for art therapy and public school systems to create successful partnerships.

Chapter 6, "Resilience," examines the issue of risk and the issue of protection. The study of resilience grew out of research devoted to identifying risk factors. Researchers view resilience as competence in the context of significant challenges to adaptation or development. Competencies are the healthy skills and abilities that the individual can access. Most kindergartners are excited about starting school, but some of these students lose their passion and motivation for learning. Somewhere along their educational journey, they begin to feel alienated and discouraged. Four ecological hazards have been identified in the lives of youth at risk: destructive relationships, climates of futility, learned irresponsibility, and lack of purpose. To reclaim is to recover and redeem, to restore value to something or someone that has been devalued. The elements of the reclaiming environment are grounded in four "profiles of development," which are considered as the psychological foundation of courage: attachment, achievement, autonomy, and altruism. This philosophy of child development is conceived as being embodied in a "Circle of Courage." A growing number of researchers and practitioners are using the Circle of Courage model as a basis for new approaches to prevention, treatment, and alternative education.

Chapter 7, "Art Therapy With Students At Risk," offers a foundational framework for implementing an art therapy program for adolescents. Art in therapy is used as a vehicle for psychotherapy. This approach is viewed as process oriented. In an educational environment, art in therapy assists students in benefiting from education by enhancing the student's potential for learning. Ethics in art therapy and multicultural competence in art therapy are addressed. The responsibility to art therapy clients includes a number of ethical considerations including informed consent, recordkeeping, confidentiality and its limitations, and the permission for the reproduction and use of client artwork. Recommended procedures for art therapy are provid-

ed that address the following: promoting art therapy, assessment, establishing goals and objectives for treatment planning, art therapy program review, and annual reviews for students. A recommended treatment model is presented based on Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and Cognitive Behavior Interventions (CBI). Researchers have found that CBI has shown effectiveness across educational environments, disability types, ethnicity, and gender. Creative self-expression is giving vent in constructive form to feelings, emotions, and thoughts at one's level of development. Powerful implications from resilience research have emerged to support the application of art therapy with students at risk. "The resilience of creativity is the will to accept the discipline of an art form in order to shape your pain into something else."

Putting a message in a bottle and casting it out to sea is an interesting metaphor for writing a book. You send it out with the hope that it will reach shore, land on "good" ground, someone will read the message, and you receive a favorable reply. This book is designed for art therapy students, professional art therapists, educators, administrators, and practitioners in the allied professions of counseling, social work, and psychology. I have had the opportunity to advance my research and work with diverse at-risk student populations. I have consistently found that the application of therapeutic art experiences in a safe and supportive environment fosters resilience and enhances cognitive, emotional, and social growth.

STELLA A. STEPNEY

INTRODUCTION

Let us build communities and families in which our children and youth, especially those who are most troubled, can belong.
– Nelson Mandela

The terms "alienated" and "troubled" have been used to emphasize what it feels like to be alone and in conflict. These terms, once applied to at-risk youth, have been replaced with the term "discouraged." The reclaiming movement reframes the concept of "at-risk" away from youth and toward the environmental hazards that need to be addressed. From this philosophical and theoretical model at-risk youth are discouraged and the therapeutic task is to foster courage. Researchers within the reclaiming movement advocate that successful practitioners who work with at-risk youth are those who can reframe cognition within youth to foster positive feelings and actions.

Art therapy with students at risk is a reframing of cognition. Art therapy provides opportunities for creative self-expression that can enhance students' consciousness of self, others, and the environment. The ancient Chinese proverb affirms, "I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand; In the doing is the learning."

Learning is a relative permanent change in behavior as a result of experience, practice, or both. Learning can occur directly by experience and indirectly by symbols, such as words and images. Learning can occur through actions. Learning can occur through emotions and feelings, which must be reached indirectly through the intellect or the body. Emotion is important in education because emotion drives attention, which in turn drives learning and learning requires memory.

Visual thinking is the ability and tendency to organize thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about the world through images. In essence,

visual thinking is "thinking with the senses," which can be part of a creative process. Carl Jung (1971) maintains:

> The only things we experience immediately are the contents of consciousness. . . . Consciousness seems to stream into us from outside in the form of sense perceptions. We see, hear, taste, touch, and smell the world, and so we are conscious of the world. Sense perceptions tell us that something is. But sense perceptions do not tell us what it is. . . . What it is, is told to us by the process of apperception. . . . This recognition derives from the process of thinking. Thinking tells us what a thing is. . . . The recognized image arouses emotional reactions of a pleasant or unpleasant nature, and the memory-images thus stimulated bring with them concomitant emotional phenomena which are known as feeling-tones. In this way, an object appears to us as pleasant, desirable, and beautiful, or as unpleasant, disgusting and ugly. This process is called feeling. The intuitive process is conceived as perception of the possibilities inherent in a situation. (pp. 23–26)

Creative power is one definition for imagination. In discussing the power of imagination, Pat Allen (1995) states:

> Our imagination is the most important faculty we possess. . . . It is through our imagination that we discern possibilities and options. A relationship with our imagination is a relationship with our deepest self. Whether we have cultivated our imagination or not, we each have a lifetime of patterns and habits of thoughts embedded there based on past experiences. Our expectations of ourselves and the world flow from these patterns. (p. 3)

Creative power must be formed and refined in order to gain insight into possibilities and options. Jung (1971) explains, "It is the function of the conscious not only to recognize and assimilate the external world through the gateway of the senses, but to translate into visible reality, the world within us" (p. 46). The world within us is translated into visible reality through the processes inherent in the visual arts. Kinetic energy is made visible through drawing. Sensual energy is made visible through painting. Emotional energy is made visible through color. The three-dimensional and instinctual components of experience are made visible through sculpture. The dynamics of perceived structures found within an image can be transposed into recognition of behavioral patterns and then into an expansion of students' awareness that can be used to foster positive feelings and effective change.

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I extend special thanks to Lance and Hope Drummond for the vision of the Dreamseed Program at Sojourner House. Dreamseeds is based on the premise that exposure to the arts inspires youth to "dream" a better future while exploring creativity and building self-esteem. Through Dreamseeds, the children and adolescents participate in expressive art programs that have not been readily available to them. In addition, they have an opportunity to showcase their newly acquired talents, skills, and abilities at the annual culminating event.

My work at Crestwood Children's Center provided me with the opportunity to be a part of an interdisciplinary team made up of highly-qualified professionals. To my colleagues in art therapy and the

allied professions, thank you for the dedication and commitment to the children, adolescents, and families who receive services through Outpatient/Community, Day Treatment, Residential Treatment, and Family Resource Centers.

I am grateful for the opportunities to serve the American Art Therapy Association. I embrace the mission and vision of AATA. To my colleagues in AATA, thank you for your commitment to move the organization forward into the twenty-first century.

I would like to acknowledge Janet Bush for her pioneering efforts in the specialization of school art therapy. She is a remarkable role model and a gracious lady. To Janet, thank you for the many years of dedicated service and for the influence that your work has had on my work within this specialization of art therapy.

I would like to acknowledge three African-American Art Therapy Pioneers, Georgette Powell, Cliff Joseph, and Charles Anderson. Georgette Powell is an award-winning artist, art therapist, and art educator. Cliff Joseph is a staunch proponent and advocate for multiculturalism and social activism. Charles Anderson is an outstanding practitioner, educator, and advocate for multiculturalism. To Georgette, Cliff, and Charles, thank you for your dedication, commitment, and legacy.

To my husband, Harold Stepney, you are truly the "wind beneath my wings."

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ART THERAPY WITH STUDENTS AT RISK

Chapter 1

ADOLESCENCE

Every child and adolescent deserves to experience joy, have high self-esteem, have friends, acquire a sense of efficacy, and believe that he or she can succeed in life.
– Bright Futures

Development is the process of orderly, cumulative, directional, age-related changes in an individual. A developmental perspective is a way of understanding an individual's behavior. A qualitative change is a developmental change involving a transformation of a physical or cognitive ability. Behavioral reorganization is a qualitatively new way of organizing and using capabilities. The reorganization of thoughts and actions always results in more complex behavior. Qualitative change and behavioral reorganization are evident throughout development.

Normative development is the general changes in behavior across ages that all children share. Individual development is the variations around the normative course of development seen in individual persons or each person's uniqueness. A theory is an organized set of assumptions about how things operate. It is an attempt to account for current observations and to predict future ones. Observations about children and their behavior take on meaning when interpreted on the basis of theories.

Developmental psychologist, Urie Bronfrenbrenner, postulated the theory that the development of each child will take place within a matrix of contextual influences. Bronfrenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Systems Theory (1979) looks at a child's development within the quality and context of the systems of relationships that forms his or her

environment. These contexts for development include the biological context, the immediate environment, the social and economic context, and the cultural context.

According to Bronfrenbrenner (1979), the most powerful influences come from family, school, peer group, and community, which he regarded as the "four worlds of childhood." He proposed that young people thrive in ecologies with caring families, concerned teachers, positive peers, and supportive communities. Therefore, optimal development greatly depends on a good developmental context.

Developmental psychopathology is the study of the origins and course of disordered behavior. Developmental psychopathologists are concerned with when disordered behavior first appears, what form it takes, and how it changes over time. Disordered behavior is viewed as a developmental deviation. Pathology, or any marked deviation from a normal, healthy state, can only be defined when normal behavior at a given age, and normal progressions from stage to stage, are understood. Therefore, we must look for the precursors of later disorders within the cognitive, social, and emotional challenges that are most notable at a given age.

DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAINS

Adolescence is the developmental period between childhood and adulthood, approximately at age 11–21 years old. The period is divided into three distinct phases: early adolescence (age 11–14 years old), middle adolescence (age 15–16 years old), and late adolescence (age 17–21 years old). This developmental period has always been characterized by cognitive, social, and emotional challenges.

The critical developmental domains during adolescence include the following: physical, cognitive, moral, personality, identity, racial identity, and creative. Adolescents' participation in health risk behaviors is another important critical consideration. If development is amiss in any of these critical areas, there is the potential for future problems.

Physical Development

Puberty is the period when adolescents undergo sexual maturation, accompanied by the development of secondary sex characteristics,

and a noticeable growth spurt. There are substantial individual differences in the onset of puberty and the pace of its many changes. Concerns about physical appearance can be particularly heightened during adolescence for both males and females.

As adolescents mature, their body image is modified to incorporate the physical changes that occur. Body image is an important aspect of the concept of self. The dramatic physical changes of adolescence challenge adolescents to develop a new body image and identity.

Adolescents mature at different rates and they can be vividly aware of these differences, which may cause them to compare their growth with the progress of their peers. According to David Elkind (1967), an imaginary audience is a manifestation of adolescent egocentrism in which the young person displays an unjustified belief that he or she is the focus of other people's attention. Because adolescents can think about the thoughts of others, they are able to consider what others might be thinking of them. Due to the manifestation of the imaginary audience, adolescents commonly feel that they are being observed all the time, which causes them to be extremely self-conscious and focused on their physical appearance.

Cognitive Development

Swiss biologist, Jean Piaget, postulated the theory that there are qualitative changes in the way children think through a series of stages in which cognition, or one's ability to think, becomes progressively less egocentric and experiential and more analytical. According to Piaget (1972), cognitive development proceeds through four stages: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operations, and formal operations. Each stage represents a qualitatively different way of thinking. It is not just that children acquire more information as they grow older but how they think actually changes with age. Children pass from one stage to another as a result of biological maturity and experiences in the environment.

As adolescents progress through early, middle, and late adolescence, they are in the stage of formal operations, age 12 and onward. According to Piaget (1972) formal operations are those principles of propositional logic that adolescents discover for themselves and then use to solve problems and expand their understanding of the world.

A hypothesis is a proposition that can be proved or disproved by