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USING ART TO TEACH PROBLEM-SOLVING AND OTHER SOCIAL SKILLS:
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE RATE PROGRAM

by
Jessica Anne Masino Drass

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
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of
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at
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Advisor

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ABSTRACT

Jessica Anne Masino Drass
USING ART TO TEACH PROBLEM-SOLVING AND OTHER SOCIAL SKILLS
TO ADOLESCENTS: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE R.A.T.E. PROGRAM
2008/2009

Dr. Roberta Dihoff and Dr. John Klanderman
School Psychology

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of an after-school art program for at risk adolescents. The RATE Program is designed to give at-risk students a place where they can express their emotions in a positive way. Through various art activities, such as working together to design and paint a mural for the school, the students will learn problem solving and social skills.

All of the adolescents who participated in the RATE Program were students at a rural regional high school in Southern New Jersey. Five students total attended the RATE Program regularly, ranging in age from fourteen to sixteen.

It is hypothesized that when students behave better in their classes, the students' grades will increase and their rates of discipline referrals will decrease. This was analyzed by taking a student's grade point average and number of discipline referrals at the end of the second and third marking periods. While there is no statistical significance to any of the data found in the study, there can be value in implementing a program such as RATE in the high school setting.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Adolescence is marked by a time of exploration and a time of identity confusion. Identity confusion is caused by the gap between the feeling of security of childhood and the desire for independence they will receive as an adult. Adolescents aren't quite sure where to fit in yet. Because of this, risk-taking behavior tends to increase during the time of adolescence. Many times adolescents put themselves and others at risk, just to try to find themselves, or to act out in rebellion against their parents or other authority figures. They become involved in a number of behaviors that put them at risk for physical and mental health consequences such as drug and alcohol use or unprotected sex, or they are victims of violence or abuse which can have a traumatic effect on them. Many times these behaviors land the adolescents time in trouble at school, in juvenile detention centers or at the very least, time hanging with the "wrong crowd."

Walking through the halls of any high school, one will see many of the same sights; teenagers assembled in small groups, categorized mainly by the clothes they wear. For these teenagers, image is of extreme importance, and is one of the ways that they communicate with each other. Teenagers can be reluctant to communicate with adults and those they consider to be in positions of authority. Teachers and counselors need to be creative in finding new ways to get adolescents to communicate their feelings. It may be easier to get them to try to communicate on a nonverbal wavelength, and have them be

receiving counseling and learning social skills almost without them even realizing it. Art is a way that this can be done.

Art can be seen as an alternative form of nonverbal communication (Franklin, 2000). Adolescents can be hesitant to communicate their true thoughts and feelings, especially to authority figures, which is why using art in therapy with this age group, particularly in school counseling settings, may be a viable option.

Adolescence is truly a unique time in a person's life. It is at this time that adolescents have a sense of invincibility, which could be what leads them to the reckless behavior mentioned above. They also tend to have a lack of respect for authority figures, whether they are parents or teachers or counselors, and prefer to spend their time with their peers.

Beyond these conditions, adolescents also suffer from behavior and emotional disorders that can cause them impaired psychological judgment (Kazdin, 1993). The Center for Mental Health Services estimates that 4.5 to 6.3 million children and adolescents in the United States suffer from a serious emotional disturbance (SED) that affects their daily functioning in school, home or their community. It is also reported by the Center for Mental Health Services that those with SED are either not getting the appropriate help, or not receiving any mental health services at all. Severe Emotional Disturbances include autism, ADHD, OCD, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and major depressive disorder (Marsh, 2004).

Adolescents need to be looked at as a population in their own right. Needs of adolescents are different from those of children or adults, yet this population tends to be widely ignored in the world of psychology. There are psychologists that consider

themselves child psychologists, and those that consider themselves adult psychologists, but there aren't many that consider themselves adolescent psychologists. Perhaps psychologists have been hesitant to work with adolescents due to the difficult nature of the population itself (Rubenstein & Zager, 1995).

Also, the time of adolescence itself has been looked at as more of a time of transition between childhood and adulthood rather than its own stage of development. A popular theory has been that the problems of adolescence will be one that teenagers will just "grow out of." (Kazdin, 1993). But unfortunately researchers are finding this is not the case. Adolescents are the highest risk population in the United States. For example, they have a one in four chance of school failure, delinquency, early-unprotected sex, or substance abuse. Also, the second leading cause of death among fifteen to nineteen year olds is suicide (Rubenstein & Zager, 1995). Add to this the possible exposure to trauma, as mentioned above, which can lead to further risk-taking behaviors. The effects of trauma on adolescents are that they are highly sensitized so that they can avoid further trauma, they feel numb to the world around them, they have a feeling of powerlessness, they consider themselves as victims, they are sometimes involved in self-mutilation, and have intense feelings of isolation and mistrust (Graham, 1994).

There needs to be specific treatment methods that focus on how to best reach this difficult group. In order to look at the best ways to treat at-risk adolescents, one might want to look closely at what are the boundaries of adolescence, and where they spend most of their time. During this period, school is where adolescents spend the majority of their time. It is required by law that all children must attend school until he or she is

eighteen years of age, so it makes sense that to reach at-risk adolescents with possible intervention programs and treatments, schools would be the most accessible places.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of an after-school art program for at risk adolescents. The RATE Program stands for Reaching Achievement Through Expression, and it will be a weekly after-school program that teaches students about different art activities, but more importantly, gives them an opportunity to excel in something. There are many students who have trouble controlling their anger or other emotions, and that can lead them into trouble, especially in school. Some students are so used to acting out that they consistently are spending time suspended or in detention. They do not know how to act properly in class, how to deal with authority figures, and in turn, their grades suffer. Many times these students start to expect the least from themselves, because no one expects anything more from them. This program is designed to give these students a positive place where they can freely express their emotions. Through various art activities, the students will learn problem solving and social skills, and hopefully they will carry them into their classes and relationships.

Hypothesis

The first hypothesis of this study is that art can be used as a tool to teach problem solving skills and other necessary social skills to students that have consistent behavior problems. The second hypothesis is that when students learn these skills, they can better express their feelings or control their emotions. The last hypothesis is that when students

behave better in their classes, their grades will go up as their detention and suspension rate will go down.

Definitions

As mentioned above, the RATE program stands for “Reaching Achievement Through Expression.” Another main area to define in this study is problem-solving skills. Students who tend to be good problem solvers possess the following qualities:

- Willing to use a process to tackle problems
- Monitor their problem-solving process and reflect on its effectiveness
- Write down ideas and create charts or figures while solving a problem
- Are organized and systematic
- Are flexible, and they keep their options open while also have the ability to view a situation from different perspectives or points of view
- Are willing to risk and cope with ambiguity, welcoming change and managing stress
- Use an overall approach that emphasizes fundamentals rather than trying to combine various memorized sample solutions (Mourtos et al 2004).

Another term to define is the “at-risk” adolescent. What determines “risk” in the case of adolescents is their behavioral, social, educational and psychiatric functioning, cognitive ability and physical health (Bowen & Flora, 2002). Also, while there will not be any counseling happening in the RATE program, the idea of art therapy will be mentioned. The practice of art therapy has been quoted as “a psychoeducational therapeutic intervention that focuses upon art media as primary expressive and communicative

channels (Kahn, 1999).” In the RATE program art will be used as a means of communication for the students.

Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study is that it uses a very small population in one specific location. There will be 15-25 participants, all of which are high school students from a large regional high school in rural Southern New Jersey. Because of these limitations the results should not be generalized to other populations. Another limitation of the study is the fact that not all of the students in the program will be at every weekly meeting. Lastly, it may be difficult to measure students’ problem solving skills.

Summary

This study will focus on the effectiveness of using art as a means of communication for at-risk high school students. The students will create art projects that will help build their problem-solving skills. It will be seen if participation in the program has a positive affect on a student’s grades, rate of disciplinary action, and relationship with authority figures such as teachers and administrators. The next chapter will show the history of using art and explain previous research in the area. Chapter 3 will focus on the design of the study; it will look at the methodology, the participants, the specific intervention, and the different types of measurement. In Chapter 4 the results from the study will be analyzed. In the final chapter the results will be interpreted and suggestions will be given for further research and study.

CHAPTER TWO:

Literature Review

Introduction to Previous Research

Teaching social skills can greatly enhance an adolescent's self-concept. The idea of adolescent self-concept is based on an adolescent's view of his or her own individual performance in eleven criteria. Those criteria are: mathematics, verbal ability, general school performance, physical ability, physical appearance, relationships with same sex and opposite sex peers, relationships with parents, honesty and trustworthiness, emotional stability and their general self (Hay, Byrne and Butler 2000). It is hard to separate the idea of self-concept versus self-esteem, so they are generally regarded as being one in the same. Throughout time, art has been seen as a way to communicate, and can be very helpful in getting students to express their feelings. The idea of using art in this way has its roots in the concept of art therapy. It is important to have an understanding of how to use art in this manner, and much of research that has been done on this subject is under the heading of art therapy. In order to understand how to best implement a successful and efficient art-based social skills training program into a setting for secondary school students, there needs to be a basic understanding of what art therapy is and how it works. (Kahn, 1999). While the RATE Program will not be counseling the students, the assignments given will be based on the fundamentals of art therapy. It is very important that people who are not properly trained in art therapy should not try to counsel, or interpret a student's artwork. This chapter will explain why using art as a form of

communication works for the adolescent population specifically. The last sections of this chapter deal with the actual counseling process and ideas for implementation into school systems, as well as showing some real-life examples. To see if this is an effective form of intervention, a number of studies and articles have been examined. A few focus on extreme situations with one-on-one and group therapy, and others branch out into how this could be used in a regular classroom setting. Different methods will be discussed, as well as the process the teacher or counselor should take with the student. In addition to research on using art with adolescents, the areas of discipline, punishment and development of problem-solving skills will also be looked at individually, and how they pertain to the high school setting.

Brief History of Art Therapy and How it Works

Art therapy deals with the power of the image. People could talk forever and still never reach the depth of the emotion that art therapy can (Provencal & Gabora, 2007). Art's nonverbal characteristics are what enable clients to release pent up emotions and traumatic experiences. Through art, the client has a chance to show very strong emotions graphically, which can be difficult to express in words. The client is able to examine their feelings, and accept them and come up with strategies to deal with them (France & Edward, 1997). Research has found that organized arts activities are an area for identity exploration and development for adolescents, and may even help them with their interpersonal relationships and with building initiative (Larsen, Hanse, & Moneta, 2006).

The idea of merging art and psychology dates back to the early twentieth century, with the idea of the unconscious mind put forth by the work of Sigmund Freud and Carl

Jung. This branched out into the art world with the Surrealist movement, which took its inspiration from unconscious dreams and desires, and then led into the Expressionist movement, where artwork was based on the emotional torment of the artist (Provencal & Gabora, 2007). The practice of art therapy started in the 1940's with the idea of free association and the unconscious experience. There was also the idea of the art-as-therapy approach. Here the counselor worked more as an "interpreter" of the spontaneous art that was created. In these times, the goals of the art-as-therapy approach were to:

- 1) Support the ego
- 2) Foster the development of the identity
- 3) Promote maturation (Kahn, 1999).

The practice of art therapy has been quoted as "a psychoeducational therapeutic intervention that focuses upon art media as primary expressive and communicative channels (Kahn, 1999)." More can be seen and understood in a client's artwork than in what they say, due to the spontaneous nature of the process (France & Edward, 1997). Art can act as a framework to try to heal psychological injury or trauma that may have occurred in the early stages of life, but have not manifested itself until much later. The Stronach-Buschel theory says that an art program would help trauma resolution particularly because adolescents will be enabled to challenge reality through the sublimation of their trauma. They would be freed temporarily from their superego and would feel competent and they would not feel like a victim (Graham, 1994). Within art's supportive silence, a myriad of feelings are able to be expressed, even opposites simultaneously, while the creator never has to worry about being judged for saying the wrong thing (Franklin, 2000). This is especially important in adolescence, where they are

always mindful of their “imaginary audience,” - the constant watchful eye of their peers. An adolescent is always looking for approval, and is trying to fit in somewhere and have a sense of belonging, even if he or she does not always want to admit it.

The reason art works in therapy is that it acts as a metaphor. It distances the client from their own problem and allows them to view alternative solutions (Riley, 2001). The process of art gives visual symbols, which are clues into the deepest layers of the psyche (Franklin, 2000). Art can actually break through the layers of neuroses that build up and can help act as a foundation for later psychological growth and development. By using art during therapy, clients are actually re-experiencing their problems, which makes their counseling experiences more immediate. This is actually a more effective way of dealing with issues that are difficult to express (France & Edward, 1997).

Reasons to Use Art Therapy During Adolescence

There are many reasons why, developmentally, adolescence is a good time to use art therapy. Adolescence is a very important time for self-expression and self-exploration, and a time for distinguishing oneself from one's family. This is done in a number of ways. It is done through creativity, experiences that are pleasurable, symbols that are age appropriate, and control of the creative process. What is also important to note is that adolescents are comfortable expressing themselves and communicating with images. It actually decreases their defenses, and in this nonverbal process of artmaking, the counselor themselves are less likely to be seen as an authority figure, so the adolescent can be more likely to open up and give their true feelings (Kahn, 1999).

Many adolescents are extremely concerned about their image, and would rather put their mental health at risk than go see a therapist, for fear of the stigma attached to it. But with art therapy, they do not have any preconceived ideas; therefore adolescents are more open to this form of treatment (Riley, 2001). The idea of using art in the counseling forum is becoming more widely used due to the way it utilizes expression as a form of helping the client. Art is used in conjunction with other psychotherapy techniques and can be used in any number of settings from schools to rehab centers and hospitals.

Its success has been seen with patients who have suffered traumatic experiences as well as other behavior and emotional issues (France & Edward, 1997). Children and adolescents don't respond to trauma in the same way as adults do. Their symptoms manifest themselves in ways such as play, drawing and story-telling. It can be extremely difficult for a child or adolescent to recall a trauma verbally, which is why drawing and paintings have been important parts of treatment in disorders related to trauma (Lyshak-Stelzer, Stinger, St. John & Chemtob, 2007). School counselors have seen many children who have a difficult time finding an accurate way to communicate their experiences. If there is trauma involved in those experiences, art can serve as a "tool" to help the adolescents communicate during their wordless moments (Franklin, 2000). It is through art that developmental issues and personal problems such as appropriate social behavior, academic difficulties, peer pressure, conflicts with teachers, career explorations, along with a host of other issues can be worked out freely (Kahn, 1999).

Different Types of Art Therapy

Traditionally, art therapy has its roots in psychodynamic theory, which some counselors and therapists may feel is an outdated approach. In recent years there have been some new methods of treatment that have branched out that seem to be working well with the adolescent population, especially in the school setting. Today's counselors and therapists might be more comfortable integrating art into their therapy or counseling sessions with one of the following approaches. It can be integrated into behavioral therapy by having an adolescent create goals for his or herself and come up with behaviors on how to adapt their lifestyle to achieve that goal. The drawing assignment would then be to draw a bridge from their current self or behavior to their goal. Through this activity the student sees what it will take for the behavior to be realized

Art therapy could also be used in client-centered therapy, where the counselor would focus on the adolescent's creating art as a means for self-actualization by way of their self-expression. An art assignment for this could be a collage depicting how the student sees himself or herself in the world. This way the counselor can get a feel for the adolescent's view of their self and their place in their environment. Art therapy can even be used in cognitive and solution-focused therapies, where it would help explore irrational thoughts and also build on the strengths of the adolescent (Kahn, 1999).

Possible Steps to Incorporating an Art Therapy Program into a School Setting

While some teachers and counselors may still be hesitant to incorporate art into their school's programs, here are seven steps that Beverly Kahn, in her article , Art

Therapy with Adolescents; Making it Work for School Counselors, recommends that will ensure success in implementing such a program:

- 1) Have permanently set-up in the office an art station that is visible and readily available for all who enter.
- 2) Normalize the use of art in counseling. Describe the process to students, faculty, and parents in your initial meetings with them, including orientations to guidance services, parent-teacher meetings, and faculty and team meetings.
- 3) Explain to parents and teachers the value of using art with clients of all ages. Emphasize the benefits associated with adolescents' developmental needs.
- 4) Have teachers experience the process personally. For example, at a team meeting have them create and share their career path to this current job through drawing or pasted magazine images.
- 5) Consistently remind students that this process is about communicating and expressing through art, not about artistic talent.
- 6) Issues of confidentiality extend to artwork and need to be clearly stated during initial sessions. Art is not shown to teachers, parents, or specialists without the student's permission. It is rarely exhibited, because the emphasis then shifts from communication to the creation of a product.

Finally, if art is used in research or publication, the identity of the client is concealed.

- 7) Make a decision about the storage of artwork during the counseling process. Will it stay with the counselor or go home with the student? There are many advantages to keeping the work filed in the guidance office. It may be used as a future reference or gauge in assessing progress. However, keeping the work requires an organizational system and space. (1999).

These steps can be very helpful in trying to establish an art as therapy program in a school setting. A few of these should be examined a bit closer, such as the set up of the art area and supplies, as well as the process itself.

Set-Up of the Room and Types of Art Media Used

When an adolescent walks into a room for art therapy for the first time, they are usually taken aback by what they see (Riley, 2001). The art station should be in an accessible area for the student, and it should be well stocked with a wide variety of art materials at all times. Each art media has its own expressive quality. Clay will evoke a different reaction from the student than paint; pastel will create a different reaction than pencil, and so on. The art therapist or counselor should have some understanding in the various forms of art media (Riley, 2001). When choosing art materials for a student, the counselor or therapist should think about the developmental needs of that particular student. That counselor should make sure his or her student is able to handle the given

medium, for example, a severely disabled student might not be able to handle the intricacies of watercolor. Perhaps crayon or finger paint might be a better choice for that student (Kahn, 1999).

Something else to point out about the medium of art itself is its forgiving nature. Students can take out their intense emotions on the art materials themselves. They can ask the art to take whatever shape or form the creator wants it to be, and it will stay there. Clay, for instance, will stand up to being poked and prodded, slammed and torn apart, but it won't ever hit back or run away from its creator (Franklin, 2000). This evokes a sense of control and power for the student over his or her creation.

How Art Therapy can help At-Risk and SED Adolescents in a Positive Manner: A Look at Three Case Studies

As previously mentioned, the adolescent population is one prone to great risk. The use of art therapy has shown to be very effective in adolescents who have SED such as trauma, emotional and behavioral disorders, and even adolescents struggling with substance abuse. This could be because these approaches can be easily integrated into an educational environment without having the student view them as being threatening, and they adapt well for all levels of social and emotional development (Kahn, 1999). Also, drawing can be seen as a pleasurable experience for adolescents, and it taps into their desire for tagging and graffiti, as well as their urge to make their mark on the world (Riley, 2001).

Art can be a good way for a disruptive or hyperactive student to redirect his or her energy in a more positive way than verbalizing those feelings could do. The advantage of

art as a medium is its indirect nature and the fact that it is potentially less confrontational. In the case of JP, who was being disruptive in school and in a group art therapy program, he was asked to draw a picture of his situation. He drew an island with one tree. When it came time for JP to share with the group, he said he felt alone, and that he had no connections with others because the water separated him. On the one hand, the water was good and comforting to him because it helped him be more independent, but it also added to his isolation. Members of his group agreed that they saw JP put up barriers between him and themselves. This feedback from his peers was extremely valuable, especially when the group suggested he “build a bridge to his island. (France & Edward, 1997)”

After the group discussion the counselor had a one-on-one dialogue with JP, asking him why he isolates himself on the island. He says it’s the only way for him not to be hurt. The counselor reminds JP that he has a choice in life. That he is choosing to isolate himself from the rest of the world, and that he has options now. By expressing himself in a nonverbal way, JP was able to see his situation in a more objective, and non-threatening way, and is able to look back and make decisions about what is happening in his life. “For JP and other disruptive students, talking about their feeling is taboo; art allows them the opportunity to talk about what is difficult in a creative and dynamic matter (France & Edward, 1997).”

Once again looking at Beverly Kahn’s article, *Art therapy: Making it work for School Counselors*, there is a case study about a seventeen year old male study who felt the positive effects of using art in the counseling process. Brad was a high school junior who had been abusing alcohol. He was a varsity athlete, and his family had requested

counseling to try to keep Brad on the right path. Art was used in addition to other, more traditional forms of counseling. Brad received a total of four art counseling sessions with his school counselor. In the first session Brad was told to draw what alcohol meant to him in his school and family life. He drew a bed, a TV, a closed door and the word argument but it was crossed out. When he discussed this drawing he said it represented his father's drinking and the fact that he felt isolated in his family and that there was no communication. When it came to his school situation, he drew a heart, a party and a football. Brad did not perform very well in school, and received much of his outgoing personality through his social activities and his performance on the football field. Brad agreed that there was a relationship between the two drawings, once the counselor pointed it out, and that he had used alcohol as a crutch to hide the fact that he had not learned necessary social skills from his parents (Kahn, 1999).

One of the last exercises Brad completed with his counselor was when he was asked to draw himself at a time when he felt secure socially without the use of alcohol. This is actually considered an example of solution-focused therapy, where the adolescent is forced to look at changes in his or her behavior patterns and what he or she did to achieve those changes. Brad looked to a time when he was involved in an urban youth sports team, a project he initially resisted, but ended up thoroughly enjoying (Kahn, 1999).

Through these sessions Brad was certainly not cured of his alcohol addiction, but by giving Brad the gift of self-expression and self-exploration through art, he was able to look at the role alcohol was playing in his life. He could visibly see what it was doing to him, to his schoolwork, to his family and friends, by looking at the artwork he created,

when it was laid out in front of him. This is another benefit to the use of art in therapy – its permanence. The counselor can refer back to a piece of artwork that was created by a student when speaking to other school officials, teachers or parents or when researching a student. Also, the art itself can serve as a tool for future sessions with the student. He or she may not remember what was said in a previous session, but old artwork can be brought out to discuss progress during future sessions. (Kahn, 1999).

Another place where art has been shown to have positive effects on an at-risk adolescent population is in a juvenile detention system. It has been found that prisoners who are involved in art activities have reduced stress, are able to channel their anger in positive ways, and are even able to help alleviate their depression. Prisoners that were involved in art activities reported higher levels of confidence and self-respect. They also had a higher level of responsibility and patience, as well as tolerance for others (Venable, 2005).

While the juvenile detention system is not exactly the same as the school system, some of what is learned through the above study can be applied to the public school system. The use of art is helping these at-risk adolescents achieve something that they were not able to do before. Sometimes the art room is where a student will achieve his or her highest level of functioning. In the art room productive behaviors can be taught such as decision-making (such as what to draw, what materials to use), frustration toleration (this paint is not working how I want it to), delay of gratification (this project is taking three sessions to complete), and conflict resolution (this clay reminds me of how stubborn I can sometimes be) (Franklin, 2000).

The Therapeutic Effect of Art in a Classroom Setting

It has already been stated how art can be used in a counseling or therapeutic setting, but art therapy can even be brought into a classroom setting. The creation of art itself is an emotionally satisfying experience, (France & Edward, 1997), so it would make sense that some of its therapeutic effects would spill over into the art classroom. In an article published in the American Journal of Art Therapy, Joseph Graham discusses how he uses art therapy in his art class at a high school for emotionally disturbed students. These emotionally disturbed students have problems such as alcohol and drug abuse, behavior disorders, and are self-absorbed, withdrawn or depressed. Many of these students are also classified as learning-disabled. Graham is especially concerned with the violent imagery that comes up in his students' work, which is a common theme among emotionally disturbed and at-risk adolescents. This can cause concern among counselors and teachers. It makes sense that the effects of the students' trauma would manifest itself in the students' artwork by way of symbols such as guns and skulls (Graham, 1994).

In art education the goal is slightly different than in art therapy. Even though a student could be drawing with much intensity, there could be a problem if that drawing had nothing to do with the assignment given in class. Also, another difference from therapy or counseling, in the classroom Graham does not ask his ED students point blank to draw about their drug problems, for example, but at the same time he does not discourage his students from drawing drug-related imagery if that is what they are feeling at the moment. He also feels that forcing the student to draw about their own problems in the context of an art class may make them feel uncomfortable (Graham, 1994).

Art is a way to help painful memories come to the surface so they can be dealt with accordingly (Provencal & Gabora, 2007). The artist produces metaphors for their emotional states through the symbols in their work. Many times these symbols are in the form of violent images, as mentioned before. According to Haeseler, “by drawing a violent or self-destructive event instead of carrying it out, the artist is relaying a message to the teacher, therapist or viewer. In so doing, the artist engages the therapist’s protection instead of facing the feelings alone (Graham, 1994).”

Many teachers and therapists often wonder why adolescents repeatedly use violent imagery in their artwork. It can be largely due to these three reasons:

- 1) To guarantee a response from his or her therapist, teacher or viewer.
- 2) To shock, and to get an emotional response which shows the artist’s power.
- 3) As a way to separate the artist from others (Graham, 1994).

When people see art that is shocking, they tend to ask “who did it,” and “why,” which is usually the response that the adolescents creating the artwork are looking for. Teachers, therapists and counselors need to watch out for images that clearly show that an adolescent is at risk for danger, or may potentially harm themselves or others. Some of these images include, but are not limited to: tombstones with the artist’s name on it, dangling ropes, and/or nooses.

There are also other symbols that could appear in students’ artwork that therapists and teachers should be looking out for. Symbols such as endless brick wall or prison bars are signs of hopelessness, helplessness and vulnerability. Feelings of isolation can be shown through use of scale and proportion, such as portraying oneself as being incredibly

small while other figures in the drawing would be normal size or even very large. Anger and frustration can be seen through the student's use of color. If there is an area with a bright burst of color in an otherwise dull or dark colored area, the student might be expressing emotions of anger. When a teacher sees these signs they should discuss it with the student to see if they feel the student should be referred for further counseling (Graham, 1994).

Art Therapists in the Public School System

It may seem like an incredibly difficult task to incorporate art therapy into schools, or to integrate art into therapy and counseling sessions with adolescents, but it's actually not as difficult as it seems. For example, in 1979, the Miami-Dade County Public School Clinical Art Therapy Department was founded, and now the Florida program has twenty full time art therapists who treat about four hundred students a year. These students suffer from learning disabilities, speech and language disorders, have emotional or behavioral issues, suffer from depression or have been abused. In order to be eligible for these services, the student must be referred by a social worker or school psychologist, saying that this type of non-traditional therapy would perhaps best meet this particular student's needs (Rosales, 2007).

The art therapist is trained in both art and psychology. In this particular program, there is a student whose work is highlighted. He is a senior who used to cut school frequently during his freshman year. He was quickly referred to his school's art therapist, and has produced on average three oil paintings per week. Now a senior, this student claims he almost dropped out of high school, but his time with his art therapist

enabled him to cope with his issues of low self esteem, and even explains, “When I zone in on a painting, it’s almost like a high. Throughout the whole day, I’m calm.” (Rosales, 2007 p 37).

While art therapists work in tandem with a student’s teachers, parents and other counselors, their roles are distinctly different. School psychologists are more concerned with evaluation of a student’s behavior for diagnostic purposes; Counselors are concerned with their verbal communication with a student, so they can understand the student’s personal issues and feelings. The roles of the art therapist are to diagnose emotional problems, identify barriers to learning, and give students interventions when necessary. They also are to help students achieve their full educational potential, and figure what might be getting in the way in academic and social settings. They will have a series of one-on-one and group sessions with students during the day (Rosales, 2007).

While the program in the Miami-Dade County School system is certainly unique, that is not to say that art cannot be used in more schools across the country. While it is not widely used at this time, it has been found that using art in a counseling setting can have the same results but with less time put forth, perhaps making it more attractive for overworked school counselors (Kahn, 1999). School counselors are finding more of their time being taken up with scheduling, college and work placement, IEP meetings and other state-mandated special-education regulations, in addition to the fact that their case loads are so high due to the overcrowding of schools, that they don’t have as much time as they used to spend one on one counseling their students (Kahn, 1999).

Developing Self-Concept Through Art

The reason why art therapy is good to use with the adolescent population is because it is seen as a non-threatening form of treatment. By using art as a way of communicating with teenagers, therapists, counselors and teachers can gain valuable insight into what these young men and women are truly thinking and feeling (Riley, 2001). Art has a special ability- it can allow a student to explore in one drawing, simultaneously, relationships with his or her friends, parents, teachers, and siblings, whereas in verbal communication that isn't possible. This can be especially helpful in building a student's self-concept, since it can address a number of the eleven multiple dimensions at once. It has been shown that a student's self-concept has a direct link to that student's motivation level, social behavior and psychological well-being. Self-concept also has a connection to the student's achievement and effectiveness of schooling (Hay, Byrne & Butler 2000). If an adolescent has a low self-concept, they can exhibit problems with positive classroom behavior, cooperation, persistence, leadership, anxiety, future expectations, peer interactions, planning skills, and also develop fewer alternative solutions to their problems, as well as recognizing fewer consequences to their behaviors (Hay, Byrne & Butler 2000). This is why using art therapy in a secondary school setting can be an effective alternative for treatment and intervention. Using art this way has a cathartic affect with adolescents where they are able to see the big picture all at once (Kahn, 1999). "Through appreciation of others' art, the student may then become sensitive to needs of others and how they may differ from his or her own needs, leading, in turn, to empathy at best, tolerance at least (Graham, 1994)." As the artist Paul Klee

puts it, “Art makes the invisible visible,” (Talwar, 2007 p 22), and that might be the only way to get through to the adolescent culture.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Sample

All of the adolescents who participated in the RATE Program were students at a rural regional high school in Southern New Jersey. The school is sandwiched between three major highways and is close to both Chester and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The school's total population at the beginning of the school year 2008-2009 was 1,474 students. A total of twenty-nine students were referred to the program. Either an administrator, a member of the Child Study Team or a guidance counselor referred these students to the program. An email was sent out in the beginning of the year to those individuals to explain the program and to ask for referrals. In total, twenty-eight of the referred students were contacted. Each student was met with individually to explain to RATE program, and was told that if he or she was interested in participating a signed parental consent letter was needed. Letters were sent home to all twenty-eight students, but only ten signed consent letters were received. All ten students were sent reminder slips in homeroom for the first two meeting sessions. The average attendance rate was five students a session. The students ranged in age from fourteen to sixteen. There were four males and one female that participated in the program.

Measures

For this program two surveys were created by the researcher to measure both the students' self-concept and their performance in school. These are the Self Concept Scale (see Appendix B) and the School Performance Inventory (see Appendix C). There is no reliability or validity to the surveys, since they were created by the researcher and have not been tested before. The questions on the self-concept scale are based on the eleven dimensions of self- concept (Hay, Byrne and Butler 2000). Students were given both surveys when they attended RATE for the first time. At the final meeting, the students completed the surveys again. Students' scores were analyzed using a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test.

The grades of the students were also measured. Their grade point average from the first two marking periods was recorded as a baseline measure. The students participated in the RATE Program during the third marking period. Their grades were record at midterm and at the end of the marking period.

The last item that was looked at was the students' rate of discipline referrals. The assistant principals gave access to this information. At the beginning of the study the students' number discipline referrals was recorded, which included administrative detentions, administrative warnings, in-school and out of school suspensions. At the end of the third marking period the number of discipline referrals for that marking period was recorded.

Procedure

The RATE Program took place every Thursday after school in the art room for 8 weeks during the third marking period. Permission was obtained from the school's superintendent to conduct this program at the school and to obtain the students' grades and discipline referrals. After the list of referred student was compiled, each student was met with privately to explain the program. Consent letters were mailed home to all of the parents and guardians. The students could not attend the first meeting unless a consent form was signed.

The first meeting went over the general rules of the program and what was going to happen throughout the course of the program. At the first meeting students were given initial surveys to fill out to get a baseline measure of self-concept and school performance. At the conclusion of the program students were given the same surveys.

Students were given journals to use on their own throughout the course of the program. They were told that these journals would be collected every week at the meetings. The journals were not mandatory, but were just another way for students to have a creative outlet during the week.

At the first few meetings the students worked on different art projects. When they came in, supplies would be out and ready, and snacks were provided for the students. Once everyone was settled, then the daily project was announced. Samples of projects include a self-portrait print, a hero collage, and a family tree. While the students were working, they were allowed to eat and listen to music. At the end of the meeting students cleaned up their supplies and spent a few minutes writing in their journals about their projects from the day.

After the first few weeks of the program the students began work on a large-scale group project. The students designed a mural that was painted on a wall in the school (see Appendix A). The students all voted on a design and chose a place in the school to paint the mural. The students had to work together to come up with a design. The opinions of all of the members of the group had to be considered, in addition to what would work best for the school. Once the students decided on an image, the design was submitted to the administration for approval. The students spent the remaining weeks of the program completing the mural.

Hypothesis

The main goal of this study was to show that art can have a positive impact on a student, and that it can be used as a tool to teach problem solving skills and other necessary social skills to students that have consistent behavior problems. When students learn these skills, they can better express their feelings or control their emotions. By being a member of the RATE program, students were taught how to work in a group, consider the opinions of others, and how to appropriately express themselves. The Self-Concept Scale and the School Performance Inventory measured the students' view on themselves and their behaviors in class. It was hypothesized that when students behave better in their classes, there will be an increase in their grades and a decrease in their rates of discipline referrals. This will be analyzed by taking a student's grade point average and number of discipline referrals at the end of the second and third marking periods.

Analysis Design

Enrollment and participation in the RATE program acts as the independent variable in this research study. The results were analyzed in SPSS by comparing means using a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. The three dependent variables were the students' grades, number of discipline referrals and scores on the Self-Concept Scale and School Performance Inventory. This data was collected prior to the start of the RATE program as a baseline measure and again after the completion of the program as a post assessment measure. The students also reflected in their journals at the last meeting on their involvement in the RATE Program.

Summary

In Chapter 3, the design of the RATE Program was discussed. Information was provided on the nature of the subjects, and the design and analysis of the research. The results provided by the data collected will support or disprove the hypothesis. Depending upon the results of the study, there is a possibility of implementing this program as a permanent resource for the students of this school. Other researchers will be able to replicate this type of art-centered enrichment program based on the procedures stated in this chapter. Data analysis and results of the study will be illustrated in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4

Results

Introduction

The purpose of the RATE program is to see if involvement in an after-school art program has any effect on students' grades or discipline referrals. It is hypothesized that being involved in this program helps teach problem solving skills and other social skills to students that have consistent issues with behavior in their classes. When students learn these skills, they should have more control over their emotions, which should improve their behavior in class. When these students behave better in their classes, their grades should go up as their detention and suspension rate will go down.

Results

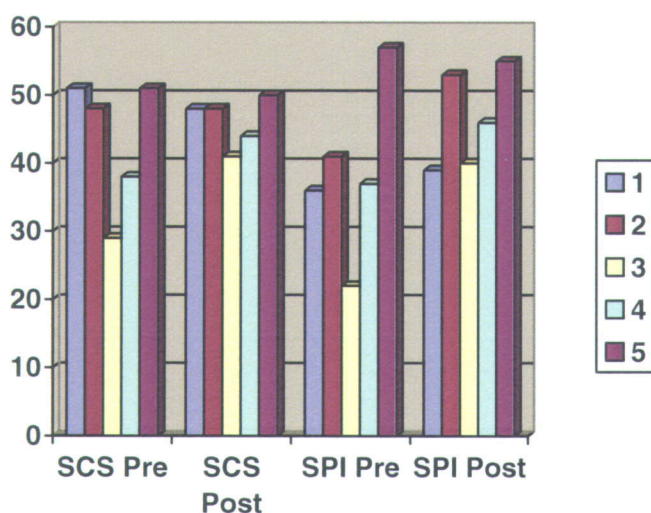
A total of five students participated regularly in the RATE Program over an eight-week period. Data was collected from the students and the administration at the beginning and the end of the program. The students' grades were recorded at the end of the second and third marking periods, as well as pre- and posttest scores on the Self Concept Scale and School Performance Inventory. Since the sample size was relatively small, the collection of discipline referrals did not yield enough data for accurate results. The rate of discipline referrals was not included when the data was run in SPSS. Anecdotally, some students had a few referrals, but two out of the five students who

participated did not have any discipline referrals at all for the 2008-2009 school year. Of the students that did have referrals, it can be noted that their rates of referrals were less during the third marking period than the second marking period. In addition, the nature of their discipline referrals was less severe during the third marking period.

Students were given both the Self Concept Scale and the School Performance Inventory at the first meeting attended in the RATE Program, and also completed the forms at the final meeting. These were designed to measure how a student feels about his or her self-esteem, and how they perceive their abilities in school. As shown in graph 4.1, the students' scores on the Self Concept Scale remained relatively the same, with a few students' scores increasing. For the School Performance Inventory, all but one student's scores increased. With such a small sample of only five subjects, no statistical significance can be drawn from this data.

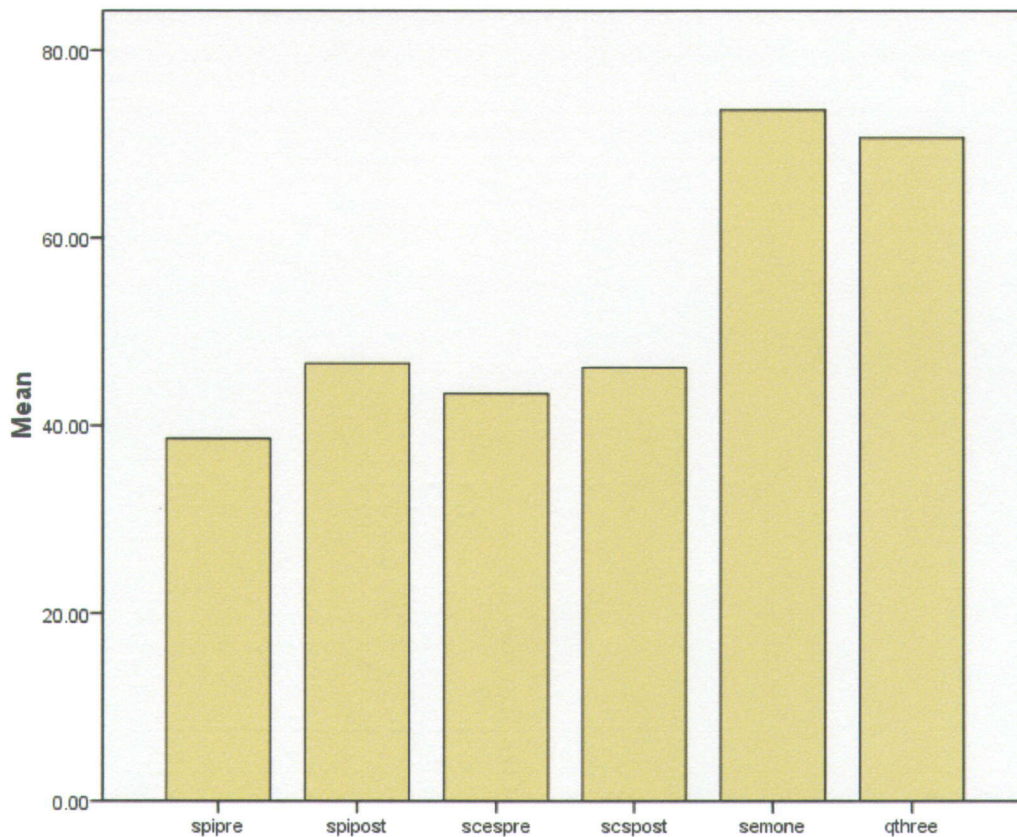
Graph 4.1 Self Concept Scale and School Performance Inventory

Scores Per Subject



A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used to measure the significance of any potential increases in students' grades and their scores on the Self-Concept Scale and School Performance Inventory. While the average scores on both the Self-Concept Scale and the School Performance Inventory did increase slightly, there was no significance to these numbers. When looking at the students' grades, the average grades for all of the students actually went down during the third marking period. This is illustrated in graph 4.2.

Graph 4.2 Average Scores of Sample



After the program was complete, students were met with individually to discuss their thoughts on their involvement in the RATE Program. Students completed a questionnaire that asked the following questions:

- Did you enjoy participating in the RATE Program after-school? If so, why?
- What are some benefits to staying after school in a program like this?
- How do you feel about being selected to take part in this program?
- Do you think that participating in this program affected you in any way?
- What did you enjoy about painting the mural?

All of the students reported that they enjoyed being a part of the program and had fun at the meetings after school. What they enjoyed most about the program was creating a permanent public art project by being able to paint on the walls of school. They also remarked that their involvement in the program gave them something positive to do with their time and kept them from getting in trouble outside of school.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

The goal of this study was to determine the effectiveness of an after-school art program for at-risk adolescents. The RATE Program was designed to give at-risk students a place where they can express their emotions in a positive way. The students were involved in various art activities, such as keeping a personal art journal and working together to design and paint a mural for the school. Through the creation of art projects and working together with their peers, students began to feel more comfortable with themselves and with others. During their time in the RATE Program, these students learned valuable social skills. It was hypothesized that when students learned social and problem-solving skills in an indirect way, such as through art, it would have an effect on the students' overall behavior and their view of their own self-concept and performance in school. Secondly, it was hypothesized that when students behave better in school, there will be an increase in their grades and a decrease in their rates of discipline referrals.

Conclusion

While there is no statistical significance to any of the data found in the study, there can be value in implementing a program such as RATE in the high school setting. It all appears to have lifted the self-esteem of the participants, not only to have been a part of the small group of students chosen for this activity, but also to be able to leave a

permanent mark in their school with the painting of the mural. All of the students who participated in the program said they felt “special” to be chosen to be part of the program. Also, being such a small group helped to foster a family-type atmosphere in the program. The students felt the art room was a “safe haven,” where they could truly express themselves and not be afraid to show who they are.

By the end of the eight-week program it was easy to see that a bond had grown between the five students, and they looked out for each other. At one meeting in particular one of the students came in after school clearly upset about something. He had an incident with a teacher that had brought him to tears. Instead of making fun of showing his emotions, the other students tried to calm him down and listened to him tell the story of what had happened to make him so upset. They also gave him suggestions on ways to remedy his situation in a positive way. When the program began these were five high school students who didn’t know each other very well or at all and by the end they were sticking up for each other. They still had some issues with behavior during the meetings, but after a while they could be redirected quickly to stay on task.

Recommendations

Of the twenty-eight students that were contacted about participating in the RATE Program, parental consent for participation was received from ten students. Five students total attended the RATE Program regularly. All of the adolescents who participated in the RATE Program were students at a rural regional high school in Southern New Jersey. The relatively small sample size is a major limitation of this study. Since this was part of a thesis study, it was difficult to get parental consent from all of the students referred, but

the most difficult part was getting students to stay after school. The five other students who had parental consent but did not participate were contacted multiple times. All of these students did express an interest in the RATE Program, but had issues with staying after school due to part-time jobs or other commitments such as sports or watching younger siblings at home. Some of the students admittedly did not want to stay after school and therefore did not participate.

Even though the results were found not to be significant, this researcher feels there is validity in a program such as RATE, although more research needs to be done on its effectiveness. It is recommended that future studies be done with a larger sample size and a longer duration of the program. Since getting students to stay after school can be difficult, another suggestion for further research is to have the program be part of the school day, or part of an in-school suspension program. Adolescents that are in the at-risk population tend to have behavior problems and they are usually punished more than they are praised. A program such as RATE can be a constructive experience for these adolescents where they can participate in something positive not only for themselves, but also for their school and community.

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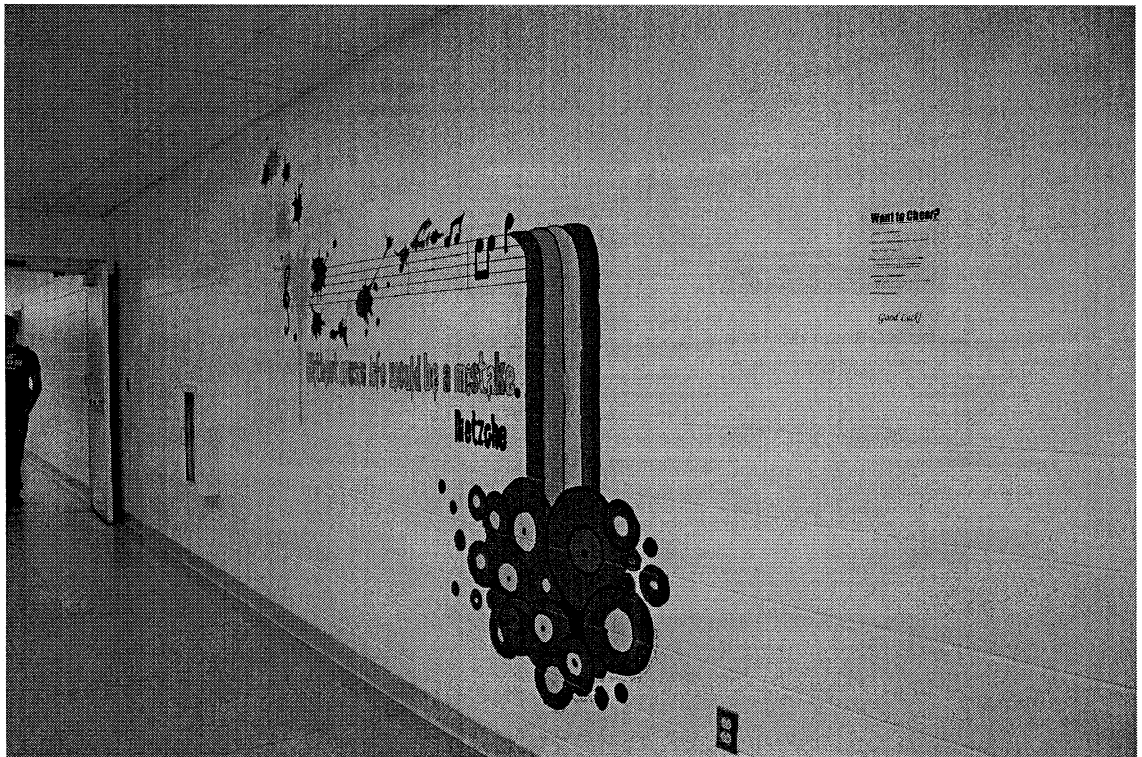
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Appendix A

Completed Mural Project



Appendix B

Self-Concept Scale

Using the scale below, circle the number which best describes the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

- 1 = Definitely disagree
- 2 = Mostly disagree
- 3 = Somewhat disagree
- 4 = Somewhat agree
- 5 = Mostly agree
- 6 = Definitely agree

- | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I am good at math. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. I can communicate well through language & writing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3. I am pleased with my school performance overall | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4. I feel confident about my physical abilities (sports) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5. I am pleased with my physical appearance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 6. I have good relationships with same-sex peers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7. I have good relationships with opposite-sex peers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. I have a strong relationship with my parent(s) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9. I feel I am honest and trustworthy. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 10. I feel that I am in control of my emotions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 11. I am overall happy with who I am. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Appendix C

School Performance Inventory

Using the scale below, circle the number which best describes the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

- 1 = Definitely disagree
- 2 = Mostly disagree
- 3 = Somewhat disagree
- 4 = Somewhat agree
- 5 = Mostly agree
- 6 = Definitely agree

- | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I get good grades in school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. I plan to continue my education after high school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3. I enjoy going to school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4. I get along with my teachers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5. I get along with my classmates. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 6. I feel I have good behavior in the classroom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7. I feel I am a leader. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. I have good planning skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9. I am good at finding solutions for problems. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 10. I am aware of the consequences of my actions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 11. I feel I can control my emotions when I am in school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 12. I feel my teachers expect me to do well. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

