

Youth Expression through Art: The development of a creative outlet for troubled adolescents

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#### Abstract

The adolescent ego is dependent upon self-expression and creativity (Linesch, 1988; Kahn, 1999; Riley, 1999). This extreme self-expression can be a stepping-stone for releasing emotional or physical stress the adolescent most certainly is facing. "Art therapy, more than any other therapeutic approach, has demonstrated it provides the creative opportunity to integrate a positive, active, non threatening therapy with the intrinsic talents and abilities of the adolescent stage of development" (Riley, 1999, p 84). In this study a group of 7 freshmen from a local high school were selected to participate in an art expression group. These students were chosen based on the negative behavior they showed in the classroom, which included not paying attention, minimal participation, and acting out. All but one of the students had a failing record as well. The goal of the group was to give the students an outlet to express some areas of conflict in their lives by providing them with a stable, supportive group outside of the classroom. Besides the main goal other goals included raising self-esteem and social interaction skills in the process. It was hypothesized that by participating in the group the students would be able to concentrate more within the classroom. The students were given a short version of the Conners' rating scale (measures behavior) for adolescents before the group began and after it ended in 4 weeks. The students' teachers were also given the Conners' teachers rating scale, which was to be filled out weekly. Each of these scales measured noticeable behavior in the classroom, positive and negative. It was found that by participating in the group the student's negative behavior decreased slightly but not statistically significantly.