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Art Therapy, Resilience, and Adolescents in Alternative Learning Environments:
Case Study of a 15 Year-Old Boy's Creative Journey

Samantha Abdallah

A Research Paper

in

The Department

of

Creative Arts Therapies

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Abstract

Art Therapy, Resilience, and Adolescents in Alternative Learning Environments: Case Study of a 15 Year-Old Boy's Creative Journey

Samantha Abdallah

This research paper explores the struggling adolescent population found in alternative high schools, focusing on how the creative act of making art within art therapy may play a role in discovering, highlighting, and encouraging resilient characteristics. In addition, focus was also placed on the client-therapist relationship within art therapy. The adolescents found in alternative high schools are often deemed to be unsuccessful, disadvantaged, marginal, or at-risk for negative internal consequences and future life events (Gross & Capuzzi, 2004; Raywid, 1998). Resiliency is a characteristic or set of characteristics that can act as a 'shield' to protect people, like these adolescents, from the great adversity in their lives so that they may flourish (Hauser & Allen, 2006; Thompson, 2006). Using a single descriptive case study design, I present the case of "Travis", a 15 year old boy who was referred to art therapy because the school staff felt he was having difficulty adapting to the new school, was isolated, bullied, and in need of a place where he could express himself. Through the use of a non-directive art therapy approach, significant steps were made towards the development of resilient characteristics related to Travis' sense of identity and his relationships with others. Focus will be placed on the less threatening nature of making art, the power of symbolic and metaphorical expressions, the parallel processes of art therapy, and the presence of both flexibility and structure found within art therapy, as well as the relationship between Travis and myself, the art therapy intern.

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- My friends for getting me out of my "art therapy bubble" time and again.
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ART THERAPY, RESILIENCE, AND ADOLESCENTS IN ALTERNATIVE
LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS:

CASE STUDY OF A 15 YEAR-OLD BOY'S CREATIVE JOURNEY

Overview

In my second, and final year of a Master's degree in art therapy, I chose to work with adolescents in alternative learning environments. This choice came as a shock to many of the people who knew me best because I have always been very vocal that my own adolescent high school experience left me with much to be desired. It seemed unbelievable to them that I would willingly choose to go back to high school and work with adolescents; adolescents deemed "delinquent" and "tough" by those on the outside of such an alternative learning environment.

When I started my second year practicum in three alternative high schools, I quickly noticed that, much too often, focus was placed on the pathology of these struggling youth instead of on the strengths they possessed. When reading the adolescents' files or listening to verbal accounts from school staff, I would hear lists of "what was wrong": conduct problems, acting out, aggression, disrespect, inattentiveness, substance abuse, to name just a few. However, when I would meet these adolescents and hear the often terrible and tragic stories of their past and their present, I was amazed by their strengths, particularly the resilience they demonstrated in continuing to survive and, in many respects, thrive despite the adversity they have faced. In this paper, I will be looking at the struggling adolescent population found in alternative high schools, focusing on how the creative act of making art in art therapy may play a role in discovering, highlighting, and encouraging resilient characteristics within these youth.

For this paper, I have chosen to do a case study based on my art therapy work with one adolescent from an alternative-learning environment, whom I shall call “Travis”. The question at the heart of this case study, which has guided me in my understanding of my work with Travis, is: *In what ways can the creative act of making art within art therapy encourage the development of resilient characteristics in adolescents from alternative learning environments?* In addition, a subsidiary question of importance for this study is: *What role does the client-therapist relationship play in art therapy with adolescents from alternative learning environments?* For the purpose of this research, I will be using the term adolescents in alternative learning environments or struggling youth as opposed to at-risk youth because I feel that the latter imposes an inevitable negative life direction. I feel that the former terms, rather than pathologizing or implying a judgment, simply describe the population. The adolescents found in alternative high schools have often been sentenced to the school as a last chance at education and are in need of remediation of behaviour, or have been referred for academic, social, and/or emotional remediation (Raywid, 1998). For those reasons, alternative high schools often cater to adolescents who, for various reasons are labeled as unsuccessful, disadvantaged, marginal, or at-risk. This population has many needs and can often be quite difficult to work with therapeutically due to the resistant and oppositional nature of some. This poses a particular problem for those in the helping profession who would like to assist and accompany adolescent clients on their therapeutic journey. In looking at the literature on adolescent art therapy and, moreover, through my own experience as an art therapist in three alternative high schools, I feel that art therapists possess many effective tools for working with this population. I believe that the

innate creativity of the art making process, the heart of art therapy, provides art therapists with an effective and powerful means of engaging, communicating with, and healing the psychic wounds of the adolescents often found in alternative learning environments. In this research paper, I will focus on how the creative aspect of art therapy was used therapeutically with Travis.

CHAPTER ONE: METHODOLOGY

Case Study

My central research question is: *In what ways can the creative act of making art within art therapy encourage the development of resilient characteristics in adolescents from alternative learning environments?* A subsidiary question of importance for this research paper is: *What role does the client-therapist relationship play in art therapy with adolescents from alternative learning environments?* To answer this research question I am using the case study approach. Once the university approved my proposed study, I discussed with Travis the possibility of his participation and obtained his assent (Appendix 2) before contacting his mother and obtaining her consent (Appendix 2). Both Travis and his mother were provided with a Letter of Information (Appendix 1).

According to Berg (2004), case study research is characterized by the collection of information that is detailed, extremely rich, and provides the reader with an in-depth look at the case under study. He also states that, in a case study, “the researcher is able to capture various nuances, patterns, and more latent elements that other research approaches might overlook” (p. 251). In this respect, when conducting case study research, the researcher is attempting to shed light on both the uniqueness and commonality found at the heart of the case under study (Stake, 1995). In addition, Yin

(1994) emphasizes that a case study should be used when attempting to answer ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions, when the researcher has little control over events in the study, and when a real-life contemporary phenomenon is the focus of study. As stated above, in my research I intend to look at the nuances and details of an art therapy treatment with an adolescent in an alternative learning environment, focusing on his creative processes and artistic products as well as the changes observed throughout the art therapy experience. Although I have chosen to phrase my research question differently, I feel that, in essence, it is a question of ‘how’. Therefore, the case study approach satisfies the needs of the question I have chosen to address.

A case study can take many forms and selection of what design to use depends on the question being asked. The intent behind my central research question is to use the wonderfully rich case of Travis to describe the possible links between the creative act of art making in art therapy and the development of resilient characteristics in adolescents from alternative learning environments. Therefore, I have decided to do an instrumental, descriptive case study using a single-case design. I would now like to explain my choice. Firstly, this intent would indicate an instrumental case study, in which the focus of the study is a particular research question or puzzlement and the case is used as a means of gaining insight into the question (Stake, 1995). Secondly, a descriptive case study, as the name implies, is intended to use the case as a means of describing a particular theory (Berg, 2004). As noted above, I am particularly interested in using my informative and enriching experiences with Travis to help describe the possible links between creativity, art therapy, and resilient characteristics in adolescents from alternative learning environments. Thirdly, a single-case design studies a single individual, group, or site; the

reasoning for this could be that it is a critical case (the 'perfect' example), a case that is deemed to be revelatory due to its previous inaccessibility, or it is a single case that is extremely rare and unique (Yin, 1994). I found Travis' therapy experience to be truly exemplar.

Conclusions drawn from a case study are based on information collected from a single case or a small selection of related cases therefore it would initially appear to be a poor source for generalizations. However, as Stake (1995) points out, case study conclusions can be used to modify or elaborate on previously made generalizations. Although, he continues to emphasize that the 'real business' of case study research is particularization due to the fact that the case study researcher is working hard to know the particular case to the best of their ability. Gilroy (2006) adds that the validity found in case study research is internal, whereby it is true only in the specific context of the case at the heart of the study. Due to this internal validity, generalizations cannot be made to other populations and settings, thus case study research lacks external validity. However, Gilroy adds that, "case studies describing work with people from the same population, with similar problems and using the same clinical approach contribute to the cumulative evidence base of the discipline and form the bedrock of all forms of clinical research" (p.100). Indeed, my personal hopes for this paper is that it will help educate those who work with this often struggling population about the benefits of using art therapy as a means to increase resilient characteristics.

Reflexivity

As a case study researcher, my research participant is the core of the research as I am focusing on his experience. Stake (1995) states that a case study researcher is

attempting to understand individual cases by listening to clients' stories, and in this way it is important for the case study researcher to "enter the scene with a sincere interest in learning how [clients] function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus and with a willingness to put aside many presumptions" (p. 1).

A key element to remember in any qualitative approach, such as the case study, is that the researcher, as the main instrument of study, is a real, live human being (Patton, 2002). In this respect it is important to remember that I, as the researcher, am not conducting my study in a vacuum or bubble, but am part of both my own social world as well as the social world of who or what I am studying. In this way, my own cultural and social identity, while providing me with many benefits, can also be a source of potential bias. In order to counteract the potentiality of bias in my findings, I can use reflexivity, which is the process of turning my lens onto myself in order to put my own assumptions and biases aside "so that the true experiences of respondents are reflected" (Ahern, 1999, p. 407). As Patton so adeptly put it, "to be reflexive, then, is to undertake an ongoing examination of *what I know* and *how I know it*" (p. 64). In order to do so, I must first bring these often hidden assumptions and biases to my awareness, making awareness an essential asset, as well as a key instrument, in the process of reflexivity. Ahern astutely states that the "ability to put aside feelings and preconceptions is more a function of how reflexive one is rather than how objective one is because it is not possible for researchers to set aside things about which they are not aware" (p. 408).

Ahern (1999) offers several tips on how to use reflexive bracketing, as a means of stopping my own assumptions from shaping or imposing themselves on the way I collect, process, and understand the data I receive from my participant. Ahern includes tips that

can be used in the preparation stage, such as identifying my own personal interests and issues, clarifying personal values and acknowledging where I am subjective, recognizing any feelings that may come up because they indicate a lack of neutrality, and looking for the new and surprising in my study. There are also tips for the post-analysis phase, such as reflecting on my own writing process, seeing if the literature supports what I have found, and being able to accept and integrate the feedback received from supervisors, advisors, and peers.

Triangulation

Triangulation is another means of counteracting researcher bias and of adding to the credibility of a qualitative study, such as a case study. Gilroy (2006) defines triangulation as “the use of data from different sources, gathered through different methods” (p. 100). Patton (2002) adds that triangulation is a strategy that greatly benefits the process of data analysis because it provides me, the researcher, with different aspects of the reality under study, as well as “diverse ways of looking at the phenomenon but in adding to credibility by strengthening confidence in whatever conclusions are drawn” (p. 556). Within this case study, I have used triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation, and theory triangulation (Patton). My sources of data have included verbal information obtained from the participant, the school staff, and the participant’s mother, as well as nonverbal information obtained from observing the client. I have also included my own clinical notes, which consist of descriptions of sessions and my own interpretations of what transpired in our sessions. Analyst triangulation has occurred through supervision with my supervisors and classmates, as well as through the feedback of my research

advisor. Finally, a major aspect of triangulation in my process has been the utilization of various theories to understand the diverse information I have collected.

Of special note, the artwork produced in art therapy is another valuable source of data to add to the strategy of triangulation. As a physical artifact and a visual record produced by the individual under study, the artwork is a rich source of information. As stated by Gilroy (2006), “case study research that draws on visual methods enhances its validity because artworks triangulate with texts of various kinds” (p. 100). The artwork can illustrate or highlight data collected verbally from the client, data obtained in various theories presented in the literature, as well as interpretations provided by the researcher. I feel that it adds texture, life, and dynamism to the research experience.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

My literature review begins with a look at adolescent development, providing a brief overview of the changes occurring at this time while focusing on identity development, the development of how adolescents relate, and adolescent creative development. As I am focusing on adolescents who attend alternative learning environments, a particular subset of the adolescent population, I will then provide the reader with an exploration of what alternative learning environments are and what characteristics are often associated with the adolescents who attend them. This will be followed by a review of various outlooks concerning characteristics found in resilient adolescents. My literature review will then move on to the topics of creativity and art therapy, first exploring some relevant theories of creativity and ending with a look at the literature supporting art therapy as a form of treatment for adolescents.

Adolescent Development

G. Stanley Hall, often referred to as the father of the scientific inquiry of adolescence, considered the period of adolescence as one ripe with upheaval, conflict, and mood swings, and therefore labeled it a time of storm and stress (Santrock, 2007). Santrock credits Hall with the burgeoning of adolescent scientific inquiry but states that his view of storm and stress has encouraged a negative, stereotyped image of an abnormal and deviant adolescent. In more recent years this negative image has changed to a more positive one, thus influencing both the way in which adolescents are perceived as well as the approaches used to work with this age group (Edwards, Mumford, & Serra-Roldan, 2007; Santrock).

The developmental period of adolescence could also be described by the words 'transformation' or 'metamorphosis'. In his book on adolescence, Santrock (2007) emphasizes the physical, socioemotional, and cognitive changes that occur during this period of human development. On a physical level there is puberty, which involves rapid physical changes in the adolescent's body, such as growth spurts and sexual maturation, due to the levels of growth and sex hormones being excreted. The socioemotional level of adolescent development is comprised of changes in: (a) the awareness of and ability to cope with emotions; (b) consolidation of identity and stable personality traits; (c) interpersonal relationships; and (d) social contexts. Finally, on the cognitive level the changes concern how adolescents think about and understand the world and their experiences within that world, focusing in part on Piaget's formal operational stage, in which adolescents begin to reason in ways that are more abstract, idealistic and logical. In this way, adolescents no longer require a concrete object or event in order to instigate or

direct thought, instead they are able to use their own internal reflections (Berk, 2006).

This ability to think in a more complex and effective manner leads to dramatic changes in how they perceive themselves and their world. This also leads to a new form of egocentrism, in which adolescents feel that everyone is focusing their attention and concern onto them (imaginary audience), and that they are so unique and special that no one else can possibly understand what they are going through (personal fable).

Identity development is considered by many (Berk, 2006; Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966) to be the most important psychosocial developmental task of this period of life. In her definition of identity Berk notes that it is the chief personality achievement of adolescence and that it is essential in the path towards a productive and happy adult life. Berk highlights that the search for an identity is the “search for what is true and real about the self” (p. 400) and that it drives many of our choices. In this search for, or construction of, an identity, adolescents must decide who they are, what they value, and the choice of directions they would like to pursue in life. Within this concept of identity, there is self-concept (how they view themselves) and self-esteem (how they value or evaluate themselves). In his theory of psychosocial stages of development, Erikson recognized identify versus role confusion as the psychological conflict of adolescence. He stated that during this time of development, adolescents experience an identity crisis, which is defined by Berk as a temporary period of distress as adolescents experiment with alternative values and goals before settling on one. In addition, Berk adds that adolescents “go through a process of inner soul-searching, sifting through characteristics that defined the self in childhood and combining them with emerging traits, capacities, and commitments” (p. 400). Once this soul-searching is complete, adolescents form these

traits, capacities, commitment, values, and goals into a “solid inner core” that allows them to experience a sense of self-continuity and maturity as they navigate through various roles in life (Berk). In Erikson’s theory, role confusion is the negative outcome of this crisis, and includes a lack of a firm identity so that these adolescents may appear to be superficial, without direction in life, and unprepared to face the challenges of being an adult. Marcia expanded on Erikson’s theory by adding more variations in the outcome of this identity crisis. Marcia called these variations “identity statuses” and labeled them identity achievement, identity moratorium, identity foreclosure, and identity diffusion. These statuses vary along the concepts of exploration and commitment.

Literature has also been written on the creative development of adolescents. Bloch (1995) states that heightened creativity is increasingly present in the adolescent period of development. Adding that the capacity for creativity in adolescence is a means of dealing with the conflicts and traumas adolescents will experience in varying degrees of intensity. He further asserts that these products of the adolescent’s creativity (art, poems, music) are new and unique forms of expression to the adolescent and are made possible by the newly sharpened synthesizing and perceiving functions of the adolescents’ egos. Rubin (2005) asserts that the creative development of children and adolescents progresses freely along a series of stages, whereby the adolescent period is characterized by the Naturalizing (ages 9-12) and Personalizing stages (ages 12-18). The Naturalizing stage consists of an increase in concern for representing the world as it is seen, coupled with an increase in dissatisfaction and self-criticism when created images do not meet their high standards. The Personalizing stage is characterized by the intentional personalization of their artwork, in addition to self-conscious exploration and the expression of the

adolescent's emerging identity. These theories of creative development are important for art therapists to consider when working with adolescents.

Alternative Learning Environments and their Students

Raywid (1998), a leading advocate for alternative high schools in the United States of America, emphasizes the innovative nature of these schools with their informal atmosphere and small scale, as they depart from the procedures and regulations of traditional schools. She further states that alternative high schools have been designed to cater to the needs of those students who do not seem to thrive in traditional schools; therefore, often being associated with students who for various reasons are unsuccessful, disadvantaged, marginal, or at-risk. Within the rubric of alternative high schools, Raywid identifies three types of alternative programs, which can be found in varying degrees or combinations. The first type of alternative program is characterized by a student's choice to attend the alternative school, due to this type's popularity and high degree of innovation. The goal of this type is to provide all students with a challenging and fulfilling learning environment that differs from the traditional in terms of innovation and uniqueness. The second type of alternative program is characterized by the student being sentenced to the school as a last chance at education, with the goal of this program being behaviour modification. The schools that fall under this type have been compared to "soft jails". The third type of alternative program is characterized by the student being referred to the program due to a need for academic, social, and/or emotional remediation or rehabilitation. The ideal goal of this type of alternative school is to return these students to "regular" schools after treatment. Although there can be an overlapping or

combination of types, the distinguishing factor remains whether the student had a choice, was sentenced, or was referred to the alternative high school.

Certain characteristics have been associated with the adolescents who attend these alternative schools, especially those of the sentence and referral type. Fuller and Sabatino (1996) used demographic questionnaires, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-Adolescent (MMPI-A), and the Behavioural Assessment System for Children (BASC) with fifty 'at-risk' students, in four alternative high schools to obtain data about the attitudes and personality characteristics of these youth. Their study found the presence of six factors: (a) defensiveness and hopelessness; (b) attention seeking behaviours; (c) antisocial disorders; (d) conduct disorders; (e) difficulties with interpersonal skills; and (f) problems in family relationships. I find Fuller and Sabatino's results reminiscent of Gross and Capuzzi's (2004) conceptualization of youth *at-riskness*, in which at-riskness is defined as encompassing "a set of causal/effect (behavioral) dynamics that have the potential to place the individual in danger of a negative future event" (p. 6). Such negative future events can include pregnancy, gang membership, abuse of drugs and alcohol, violence, eating disorders, dropping out of school, increased and dangerous sexual activity, homelessness and suicide (Gross & Capuzzi; Halpern, Kaestle, & Hallfors, 2007; Kidd, 2006; Kidd, 2007). In addition, negative internal consequences are also strongly coupled with adolescent at-riskness and can include social withdrawal, somatic complaints, anxiety, depression, a sense of hopelessness, the abandonment of hope, as well as the lack of aspirations and the expectation of an early death (Bolland, 2003; Kidd, 2006; Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007). Quite a grim

picture is painted when looking at the negative characteristics and possible negative outcomes of these youth.

Characteristics of Resilient Adolescents

Hauser and Allen (2006) define resiliency as “unexpected adaptation in the face of serious adversity” (p. 550). Another similar definition by Thompson (2006) emphasizes that resiliency is comprised of “a set of qualities that foster the process of successful adaptation and transformation, despite risk and adversity” (p. 55). In other words, resiliency is a characteristic or set of characteristics that can act as a ‘shield’, thus protecting the person from the great adversity in their lives so that they may flourish.

In a longitudinal study spanning about 20 years, Hauser and Allen (2006) came to some interesting conclusions about the presence of resiliency in struggling youth. Through semi-structured, clinically guided interviews, Hauser and Allen collected the narratives of 70 non-psychotic adolescent patients at a psychiatric hospital. These adolescents had been diagnosed with either disruptive behaviour disorders, mood disorders and/or personality disorders. In addition, these adolescents had experienced other serious misfortunes such as hospitalization due to their diagnosis, as well as personal trauma (most often abuse). Hauser and Allen also included a control group consisting of 76 non-patient adolescents from the freshman class of a local high school. The narratives were collected annually throughout the participants’ adolescence (ages 14 to 17 years old), and eleven years later as young adults. The interviewers found that nine participants had overcome the adversity of their youth and grown into young adults functioning in the top 50th percentile of all former participants including both patients and non-patient high school students. The narratives of these nine individuals were then

analyzed using a coding system to determine what individual or interpersonal characteristics could be found within these resilient individuals. Hauser and Allen found the two general themes of representation of self and of interpersonal relationships.

Within the general theme of representation or construction of self, five content themes were found: (a) self-reflection or the increased awareness of their feelings and thoughts; (b) agency, playing an active role in decision-making; (c) self-complexity or the ability to recognize many sides of the self; (d) persistence and ambition in their daily life; and (e) self-esteem, in that “the overall balance [was] tipping in the direction of kinder self-regard” (Hauser & Allen, 2006, p. 572). These resilient characteristics relating to the self are reminiscent of the definition of identity mentioned previously (Berk, 2006). Hauser and Allen also found a structural theme in that the narratives of these resilient adolescents/adults were more coherent and engaging in nature than those of the non-resilient adolescents. Under the general theme of representation or construction of relationships, three themes were found. The first is that these individuals placed a great deal of importance on the close relationship in their lives and indicated a thirst for developing relationships. Linked to this first content theme is also the fact that they were more reflective of the motives, feelings, and thoughts of others in their lives. The second content theme involves how these individuals actively found or ‘recruited’ relationships, instead of waiting for chance to throw friends their way. Finally, these individuals were also able to see the connections that existed between themselves, their relationships, and their actions, which included both physical actions and emotional states.

In her book, *Healing the inner city child: Creative arts therapies with at-risk youth*, Camilleri (2007) includes a more detailed list of characteristics of resilient children. Firstly, she lists good social skills as an important characteristic of resilience, due to the fact that relating to adults and peers in responsive and compassionate ways aids in building social networks. Social networks are essential as sources of support through difficult times. A second resilient characteristic is the ability to resolve conflict through positive means such as through communication and compromise. Negative conflict resolution techniques tend to increase 'at-risk' behaviours as they often include ineffective and confrontational techniques such as avoidance and physical violence. Thirdly, effective problem-solving skills such as planning, thinking abstractly, and flexibility are found to be important to resiliency in youth. The ability to manage difficult, and often intense, emotions is a fourth characteristic of resilient youth listed by Camilleri; it also includes the child's ability to recognize when they need help and to find help in trustworthy adults. A fifth characteristic of resilient youth is related to their self-concept, or the way in which they view themselves and the events in their lives. Resilient children possess a sense of power, independence, and responsibility, which encourages them to believe in themselves and their abilities. Finally, resilient children are found to possess positive expectations for their future.

Theories of Creativity

Despite the diversity of theories concerning creativity, certain key characteristics are shared by several important authors (Estelle, 1990; Rogers, 1962; Rubin, 2005; Winnicott, 1971). Rogers (1962) sees creativity as involving an awareness of and interaction with the world. This conceptualization is also apparent in Winnicott's theory

of creativity in which he states that the “creativity that concerns [him] here is a universal. It belongs to being alive” (p. 91). In this way, creativity involves not only the creative act of making art but also the individual’s approach to interacting with the world. Along a similar vein, Estelle, who was inspired by Rogers’ work, wrote that creativity required “a sense of connectedness balanced against enough detachment to allow for individuality and subjective order” (p. 112). For Estelle, creativity needed to involve a sense of differentiation, in which an individual could recognize that his or her sense of self was both unique and relational, meaning it could fluctuate dependent on the environment. This concept of unique and relational relates to what Estelle calls the synthesizing function of creativity, which she believes to be an integral characteristic of creativity. In addition, Estelle also names other elements of creativity as integration, commitment, and engagement. It is interesting to note that Estelle’s elements of creativity are all words that describe an individual’s relationship with the self and with external reality.

Rogers (1962) stipulated that to be truly creative, and thus to realize potential and come into being, an individual must meet three inner conditions: a) an openness to experiences; b) an internal locus of evaluation; and, c) the sense of spontaneity and exploration, or the ability to play with elements and concepts. In addition, Rogers (1962) adds that there is a need for the external conditions of psychological safety (unconditional worth, no external judgment, empathy) and the psychological freedom to express oneself. Rubin (2005) provides a similar conceptualization of creativity as she discusses her idea of the *framework for freedom*. With the framework for freedom, Rubin asserts that creativity must be comprised of both genuine freedom (chaos) and order, in order to allow children and adolescents the space to grow. She highlights the necessity of the art

therapist to provide a framework for freedom through the provision of both psychological and physical limits and structure. This psychological and physical space referred to by both Rogers (1962) and Rubin (2005) are akin to Winnicott's (1971) concept of the transitional space. In essence, the transitional space is a place of in-betweens. It is a place in which an individual's external and internal worlds, or their conscious and unconscious can co-exist and interact, thus making it possible for an individual to work through issues or make new discoveries about themselves. However, in order for this space to come into existence, the individual has to feel safe enough to experiment, explore, play, and be creative.

Art Therapy and Adolescents

This section of my literature review explores the numerous benefits of using an art therapy approach when working with adolescents. These benefits, to be discussed in turn below, include its socially acceptable and less threatening nature, the power of symbolic and metaphorical expressions, the innate parallel processes, and the presence of both flexibility and structure.

In discussing the utility of the creative arts therapies in engaging at-risk inner city youth, Camilleri (2007) mentions the socially acceptable nature of art making which reduces the stigma often associated with seeking therapy. The fact that the adolescent or child is often familiar with the art materials serves to decrease resistance to the process as well. In addition, Camilleri states that, more importantly, "participation in the arts is fun, playful, and intrinsically gratifying which increases motivation, investment, and participation in therapy" (p. 66). Emunah (1990) makes a similar assertion when she describes her concept of expression in the creative arts therapies as being a means of

providing adolescents with a nonverbal, non-threatening, and constructive means of expressing their most intense and complicated internal experiences. Similarly, Riley (2003) mentions how the non-threatening nature of art expression allows adolescents to feel more comfortable as they can gradually release material nonverbally until they are ready to use words. In this way, adolescents may engage in art therapy because the art offers them both a means of acting out their feelings as well as giving them control over *what* and *how* they communicate. Moon (1998) developed the term *metaverbal* to denote “experiences that are beyond words” (p. 8). He adds that at the heart of art therapy’s curative potential is the *metaverbal*, which includes the interaction between the client, the media, the image and the process.

Once engaged in the art therapy process, the ability to use symbolic representation or to work within the metaphor proves to be another important means of communication and healing in art therapy. Moon (2007) defines the term *therapeutic metaphor* as any story, artwork, movement, or artistic process that “is analgous to a situation in the client’s life” (p. 8). In addition, he adds that a *visual metaphor* is an artwork or artistic process that is being used to describe something or someone else, such as the client. Using symbols and metaphors in therapy, instead of words, creates a safe distance or space between adolescents and their emotions as they can disguise the intense emotions within the symbol or metaphor (Camilleri, 2007; Moon, 2007). Camilleri adds that the safe distance created by the symbol or metaphor “will pave the way for integration of negative emotions and experiences as therapy progresses” (p. 68). Along a similar vein, Linesch (1988) highlights how direct interpretations of the adolescent’s artwork or behaviours can be destructive to the adolescent’s fragile psychic structure due to the vulnerability of his

or her undeveloped ego and weak superego. Moon (1998) refers to verbal, premature and direct interpretations as *imagicide*, adding that it is “the killing off of the image through destructive psychological labeling and interpretation of art works” (p. 54). For this reason, Linesch recommends staying within the metaphor when communicating with adolescents and with their artwork. In this way, an art therapist can offer empathy within and ‘without’ the metaphor by acknowledging the hidden feelings and themes that have been expressed within the art work, and the risk taken by the adolescent to represent them, without explicitly referring to the existence of these emotions in the ‘real world’. Riley (1999) adds that metaphorical communication is a means of avoiding disclosure while still engaging in a meaningful dialogue with the adolescent. As Moon (2007) so adeptly put it, “when therapists use this indirect communication of a metaphor, clients may respond more openly to conversations that could have been met with more defensiveness” (p. 8). Therefore, the existence of symbolic and metaphorical representations or communication in art therapy provide the art therapist with a means of working safely with the adolescent’s fragile self-concept, self-complexity, and self-esteem. For some adolescent clients moving out of the metaphor is the goal of therapy, while for others it may not be appropriate.

Camilleri (2007) emphasizes that the simultaneous use of both the therapeutic and artistic processes not only provides the therapist with more opportunities to connect with and learn about the adolescent, but it also enhances the therapeutic experience. “When processes occur simultaneously within the therapeutic relationship, healing can occur on multiple levels” (p. 66). Simultaneous or parallel processing also occurs in art therapy due to the fact that creative expression often utilizes emotional, cognitive, and physical

functioning. For example, the cognitive functioning involved in verbalizing the experience may not always occur, but when it does it can add another dimension of understanding in relation to the feelings being expressed in the art. Finally, Camilleri also mentions the parallel process found in the unique nature of experiencing both the *process* of making art as well as observing and interacting with the finished art *product* itself. The importance of process and product can also be seen in Emunah's (1990) concept of containment in the creative arts therapies, which involves adolescents feeling as if they have control or mastery over the emotions they are expressing. This is done through the process of externalizing and giving concrete form to their internal feelings, impulses, and chaos. Similarly, Riley (2003) highlights how the externalization of their problem into tangible art objects can provide the adolescent with the opportunity to see their problem from other perspectives and experiment with different solutions.

The flexibility and structure of art therapy interventions is yet another effective element in encouraging resiliency. Camilleri (2007) mentions that the flexibility of the creative arts therapies is found in the freedom of play and creativity, while structure can be seen in the predictability of the art process and the sense of safety created by the therapist. I find this concept of flexibility and structure reminiscent of Rubin's (2005) notion of the framework for freedom, discussed previously. Rubin furthers that when provided with a 'framework for freedom' in art therapy sessions, the child or adolescent is given the opportunity to completely "let go" as they express strong feelings while simultaneously remaining in control of "impulses that turn out neither to be as destructive nor as disorganizing as anticipated" (p. 22). In this respect, the adolescent is growing as a result of learning on a symbolic level that they can control the impulses that often terrify

them. A related concept would be that of Emunah's (1990) expression in the creative arts therapies, in that the adolescent feels the freedom in the artistic expression as it can act as an outlet for their pain or as a means of exploring their own strengths. Through the artistic expression, the creative arts therapist is provided with a window into the inner world of these youth, which can help her in her role as witness and guide to the adolescent's exploration, thus providing further security and structure.

The Therapeutic Relationship with Adolescent Clients

Flexibility and structure is also reminiscent of the more general therapeutic concept of the therapeutic relationship. In the world of therapy, the effectiveness of any therapeutic intervention is dependent on the establishment of a strong therapeutic alliance (Meeks, 1971; Weiner, 1998). A therapeutic alliance, also known as a working alliance, is the relationship that exists between a therapist and a client. According to Weiner, it relies on mutual understanding, a shared commitment, and sufficient attachment between therapist and client. In addition, the stronger the therapeutic alliance is, the more likely clients will benefit from the therapy by the mere fact that they will be more committed to attend and invest in the process. With adolescents this therapeutic alliance becomes even more important and, simultaneously, difficult to establish due to their natural resistance at this tumultuous period of life where numerous changes are occurring. In essence "every relationship with an adolescent is in jeopardy in the early stages" (Riley, 1999, p. 40).

It is important to begin with an understanding of how adolescents relate, in general, to the other people in their lives. Meeks (1971) asserts that the way in which adolescents relate to other people is dictated not only by their eagerness to form new relationships, but also by their powerful urge to use these relationships as a means of

healing or binding their own psychic wounds. These psychic wounds can include the negative aspects of the adolescent's own self-image, as well as other more distressing introjects from past, often traumatic, experiences. Meeks labels the adolescent's way of using their relationships with others for personal need fulfillment as narcissistic attachment. Furthermore, he emphasizes that in this narcissistic attachment, the adolescent's inner needs or psychic wounds strongly colour their relationships to others. Therefore, the actual characteristics of the other person, be it another adolescent or an art therapist, "are important primarily as orientation points around which the adolescent weaves complex fantasies and suppositions which are emotionally important to him [or her]" (p. 15). In other words, in a therapeutic relationship the therapist's own characteristics, attitudes, capabilities, and intentions, are partially or wholly ignored so that the adolescent can cast them in a variety of roles that allow them to externalize their own psychic wounds. These roles can include that of a good or bad mother figure, an authoritarian or punitive adult figure, and a 'friend' figure. Therefore, part of a corrective emotional experience is in allowing the adolescent to cast the therapist into these roles. A corrective emotional experience "is to expose the patient, under more favourable circumstances, to emotional situations that he could not handle in the past" (Alexander & French, 1946). Yalom (2005) adds that corrective emotional experiences are effective because they are meaningful here-and-now relational experiences that are intended to show the client a healthier alternative to their past pathological experiences.

The concepts of transference and counter-transference are inextricably related to the therapeutic relationship. It is also within this therapeutic frame that one will find two major aspects of the therapeutic relationship: a) transference, and b) counter-transference.

Rogers (1989) defines transference as all the feelings and emotions the client directs to the therapist, including both understandable reactions to the therapist's behaviour as well as reactions that are completely unrelated to the therapist's actions. When these emotional reactions have no relation to the therapist they are projections that have been "transferred" from the original source, like the client's mother or father, to the therapist. On the other end of the relationship there is counter-transference, which is defined by Kottler (1986) as all the feelings and reactions a therapist experiences towards her client. Both transference and counter-transference can be very useful tools in therapy.

Finally, the concept of attachment is also a major player in the therapeutic relationship. Attachment is a term that was developed by John Bowlby and relates to an infant or child's tie to the mother (Mitchell & Black, 1995). More specifically, in Bowlby's concept of attachment, "emotional security is a reflection of confidence in the availability of attachment figures, which is built up gradually through early childhood experiences" (p. 137). In addition, Harris (2004) looks at attachment styles as the various ways in which people relate to other people or, conversely, defend against relating to other people. He adds that as babies grows through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood they use the same attachment patterns they learned as an infant through the way in which their needs were responded to by primary caregivers. In addition, "based on these early experiences with others, children would develop expectations about future relationships, or *internal working models of relationships*, that would shape their subsequent behaviour, often causing others to treat them in a particular way" (p. 147). In this respect, an adolescent's current way of relating to other people is a product of the initial relationship with the primary caregiver.

Conclusion

In the adolescent period of development many transformations are occurring simultaneously. When coupled with life events that encourage at-riskness this period can become quite difficult to navigate. Art therapy, and its inherent creativity, can be seen as offering many benefits to these adolescents. Therefore, the use of the creative methods of art therapy with adolescents in alternative learning environments can be an effective and powerful way of encouraging this population to explore and develop their resilient characteristics so as increase their likelihood of successfully navigating this period of development. In compiling this literature review, I have found that others have separately addressed the themes of adolescent development, alternative learning environments, the presence of resilient characteristics in adolescents, and art therapy with adolescents. However, I have not yet found literature that combines these themes together, and especially focuses on the benefits of art therapy with these struggling youth. It is my goal in this research project to link these themes together.

CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDY

Description of Travis

Travis was a 15 year-old Caucasian male who attended an alternative high school in a Canadian city. This particular alternative high school had a small student population of about fifty, and consisted largely of the referral type, although some elements of the sentenced type program were evident as well (Raywid, 1998). This was Travis' first year in an alternative high school; his previous 'traditional' high school had referred him due to academic and behavioural difficulties.

Travis liked anime, origami, computer games, pulling pranks and building elaborate constructions with objects he often found wandering the streets of his neighborhood. His face would light up with a mischievous grin, as he recounted past and future pranks and constructions, and he had a wonderful mind for three-dimensional constructions. His mother even told me, on our sole phone conversation, that Travis “can barely read and write...but oh, what a mind for the 3D!”. Travis was small for his age, but did not seem to mind his size. He wore a lot of rings and rubber bracelets, of which most had a personal story or significance attached to them. His hair was worn short and often stuck up on end, but as a tribute to his deceased father, he had left a long braided strand of hair at the back. His speech was impaired, often slurred or mumbled, and he had difficulty pronouncing some words, in addition to having a limited vocabulary. However, when calm and given the time, he was well able to verbally express himself. He had told me that his speech impairment bothered him greatly because when he got excited or agitated and spoke quickly, no one could understand him but his family. I found Travis to be an incredibly sweet boy. Throughout the eight months that I spent with him, Travis was a joy to work with. He came to every session prepared to work, create, explore, experiment, and share with me various aspects of himself.

The school psychologist and Travis both informed me that he had a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), however, there was no mention of whether he was taking medication. Attention Deficit Disorder is currently referred to in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (Morrison, 1995). With ADHD the individual is further coded as either being predominantly inattentive type, predominantly hyperactive-impulsive type, or as a combined type.

Indications of inattention include: (a) failure to pay attention to details or making careless mistakes, (b) difficulty concentrating on tasks or play, (c) not appearing to be listening when spoken to, (d) not following instructions or completing chores, (e) difficulty organizing activities and tasks, (d) avoiding tasks that require uninterrupted mental effort, (e) being highly distractible by external stimuli, and (f) forgetfulness. Indications of hyperactivity-impulsivity type include: (a) fidgeting and squirming in seats, (b) leaving seats without appropriate reason, (c) running and climbing inappropriately, (d) experiencing difficulty playing quietly, (e) appearing to be constantly “on the go”, (f) talking excessively, (g) answering questions before the question has been asked, (h) interrupting and intruding on others, and (i) having difficulty waiting their turn. To be diagnosed with either type, the individual must exhibit at least six of the symptoms listed within that type, “to a degree that is maladaptive and immature” (Morrison, p. 516), for a minimum of 6 months. Looking back on my own interactions with Travis, as well as the verbal accounts received from school staff, I feel that Travis’ ADHD was of the inattentive type. This inattention presented itself to school staff in the form of distractibility, not following instructions (i.e. in relation to homework assignments), difficulty concentrating on school work, and failing to pay attention to the details of assignments and making careless mistakes in his class work. Within our art therapy sessions I often saw a very different Travis, however, I did observe similar occurrences. I noticed that sometimes Travis appeared not to be listening to me and I would have to ask him to look at me to ensure he was focusing on what I was saying. Specifically, in relation to preparing him for breaks and the end of his art therapy treatment, I often had to repeat myself as Travis forgot details (both within a session and between sessions). In

relation to hyperactivity-impulsivity, I feel quite confident in my assertion that Travis was not of this type. He was often quite calm, patient, and appropriate. Indeed he did enjoy talking a great deal with me but he appeared to be quite quiet in other settings. In addition, he was only fidgety in our first session, from then on he did not have difficulty sitting and working.

The school had also coded Travis for language disability, which affected every level of his learning. His language disability also hindered the school's need to test his Intelligence Quotient (IQ), due to the fact that any results obtained would be inadmissible. According to verbal accounts from the school's head teacher and school psychologist, Travis had many other issues such as constant tardiness, a tendency to steal, an explosive temper, unresolved grief about his father's death, was frequently bullied, and had a very limited social network. Over my eight months with Travis, I also noticed that Travis had difficulty expressing his emotions and a tendency to blame himself for his family, personal, and social problems; often saying that it was because of his "bad attitude". Fortunately, Travis was being provided with a lot of support from the school and other outside organizations. In addition to my art therapy services, the school had provided Travis with a special laptop and tutoring to help with his difficulty in school, a speech therapist, and, near the end of our work together, he became a member of a boy's group that met once a week. Outside of school, Travis had been seeing a Big Brother from the Big Brothers and Big Sisters Organization for a couple years. Finally, Travis had been attending a summer camp for numerous years, which he spoke very fondly of and which seemed to provide him with a very important source of outside social contact.

Travis lived with his mother and two brothers; his father had died from lung cancer many years ago. Details about his father's death were few and Travis was very reluctant to talk about it; often avoiding the subject or saying that he did not remember. Both of Travis' brothers had also been diagnosed with ADD. I had been told that his older brother (17 years old) enjoyed playing with fire and often bullied and harassed Travis at home, frequently stealing or destroying his personal belongings. Travis did not speak much about his younger brother except that they did not get along and that the younger brother often teamed up with the older brother against him. Interestingly enough, Travis' brothers also shared a room in their home. Travis initially had a smaller room to himself, but was recently moved to a very tiny storage room so that his mother could store her boxes in his room. Travis often complained to me and other school personnel that he felt like he did everything in the house, such as cooking and cleaning, and that he was being bossed around by his brothers. Some of the school staff had even nicknamed Travis the "Cinderella" of his family. Although he did express a great deal of anger and frustration at his brothers, Travis persistently refused to speak a negative word towards his mother. As with his social difficulties, Travis tended to blame himself for the problems in the family structure; often stating that he needed to change his "bad attitude". His mother appeared to be quite absent in the day-to-day home life due to the fact that she worked numerous jobs. She appeared to have a lot on her plate dealing with three adolescent boys with ADD. Travis' mother had become quite verbally aggressive with the school staff, as she believed that they were to blame for Travis' behaviour and that they were letting him fall through the cracks. I had quite the different experience with Travis' mother when I called and spoke to her about my research project. She seemed

very eager to allow Travis to participate in my study and expressed gratitude at my interest in her son. She told me that “they” (meaning her and her sons) had participated in several studies and that she believed it was the best way to help “students like [me] learn”. On a final note, I had also briefly heard from Travis that he was once in a foster home with his brothers, however, he told me that he was too young and did not remember why they were there nor for how long.

Socially, Travis was often harassed and had very few friends. Travis was bullied for numerous reasons, such as his small size, his braided long strand of hair, his speech impairment, and his “odd” nature. When asked, Travis told me that he often was bullied because he had said something to offend the other person or had threatened them. Again, I felt that Travis was placing the blame on himself and his “bad attitude” for the difficulties he faced in relation to the way other people treated him. In informal, social school settings I noticed that Travis tended to be quite quiet and often on his own. However, when someone approached him or accepted his friendly advances, Travis would become quite animated. He liked to tell stories of things he has done and show them tricks or techniques (like origami). Moreover, I had observed and heard through his own accounts that Travis had a tendency to attempt to ‘buy’ friends through favours, such as giving them his drawings or helping them with their drawings, and giving them material possessions such as posters and calendars. Although I did not see Travis outside of the school setting, he often spoke to me of his friends outside, namely those he saw at camp, his Big Brother, and friends of his older and younger brother.

Goals and Treatment Plans

Travis was referred to me by the alternative school's head teacher and school psychologist because they felt that he was having difficulty adapting to the new school, was isolated, bullied, and in need of a place where he could express himself. They believed that his creative nature, evidenced by his constant drawing in class (for which he often got into trouble), would make him a perfect fit for art therapy. I began seeing Travis in October and saw him for 23 sessions, of which he did not miss a single one. His perfect attendance was noteworthy, as this population often actively resisted both school and therapy through numerous absences. In my second year of my practicum, I saw over 15 adolescents from three different alternative schools, and Travis was one of only two clients with perfect attendance.

I chose to use a non-directive approach with Travis. As previously mentioned, adolescence is a time of great change and transformation (Santrock, 2007). As adolescents try to navigate the physical, socioemotional, and cognitive changes of this time of development, the issue of control becomes increasingly important. Indeed, Riley (1999) states that, "it is crucial for the adolescent to feel that they have control over their relationship in therapy" (p. 52). This includes control over the therapeutic relationship and the therapeutic process; in essence, what they choose to show the therapist, and how they choose to communicate and interact with the therapist. I feel that a non-directive approach, so long as it is provided in a contained and safe manner, provides the adolescent client with the transitional space Winnicott (1971) refers to. A space that encourages both the chaotic and controlled, the conscious and the unconscious, and the ability to open up one's mind and be spontaneous and playful (Rogers, 1962; Rubin,

2005). It is this type of space that I wanted to provide Travis, in hopes of encouraging his creative therapeutic journey.

My goal of therapy for Travis was flexible and I continued to adapt and add to this goal throughout the eight months. I kept my therapeutic goals flexible because I wanted to allow Travis the freedom and space to work on what he wanted to work on without imposing my own agenda. Moon (2007) writes about the importance of making goals in art therapy in order to help the therapist assist the client on their path, however, he also emphasizes that art making is almost always full of surprises and can rarely be predicted. He adds that, for that reason, “art therapists must operate within the paradox of attempting to form coherent treatment plans while accepting that much of what occurs in art therapy studios defies premeditation” (p. 109). Indeed, I feel this quote highlights the importance of making goals while remaining open to the unexplained changes found in the client’s artistic process. Initially, my primary therapeutic goal was to create a strong therapeutic alliance with Travis and to provide him with a safe and creative play space where he could feel free to express himself both visually and verbally. Throughout the months I added a tangent goal of encouraging the development of resilient characteristics, focusing on the visual and verbal expressions and explorations of his identity and his relationship with others. In addition, the school came to me on numerous occasions with “requests” or suggestions about directions for my work with Travis, including their desire for me to address his stealing, his tardiness, his father’s death, and his anger. I greatly appreciated the school’s interest in Travis and our work together, as well as their desire to keep me “up-to-date” with his behaviour in school; however, I chose to remain connected

to my own goals and included the school's agenda only when I felt it was appropriate and therapeutic.

My Orientation as an Art Therapist

Referring back to the concept of reflexivity, it is also important that I speak of myself as well. I am a Caucasian female in my late twenties who grew up in a close-knit middle-class family in the same city as Travis. As I am in my late twenties, I am situated between Travis and his mother in terms of age, thus encouraging a maternal transference response. As mentioned in my introduction, I had a difficult adolescent period and felt as if that experience could help me with my understanding of Travis. However, what I found to be more significant to this research paper was my orientation as an art therapist as it helped to explain how I worked with Travis in our sessions, as well as how I have made sense of what transpired within these sessions. Although art therapists vary a great deal stylistically in their ways of working with clients, there are, nonetheless, certain commonalities among different approaches due to the fact that “art therapists have grounded their work in a variety of theoretical frameworks” (Rubin, 1999, p. 157). In general, I would label myself an art therapist who uses an eclectic approach. An eclectic approach “respects the contributions of many theorists, and enables the clinician to draw on many sources of knowledge” (Wadeson, 2001, p. 317). I agree with Wadeson when she states that the eclectic approach is in harmony with her beliefs because it takes into consideration “that therapy is growth, and that growth is a mystery” (p. 307). The eclectic approach is sometimes called intuition or an intuitive approach, however, this intuition is based in a firm grounding in psychological theory (Rubin, 1999). It is only after an art therapist has mastered some theory, when it is “in her bones” that her intuition can be

used in the most therapeutically helpful way. "Theory helps an art therapist to sharpen both her thinking and her clinical skills" (Rubin, 1999, p. 180).

In terms of psychology, my eclectic approach draws mainly from the psychoanalytic and humanistic approaches. The psychoanalytic approach is "the oldest and most elaborate among modern therapeutic approaches, and has influenced all of the others, which are either modifications of or reaction to it" (Rubin, 1999, p. 158). Psychoanalytic approaches, for example Freudian psychoanalysis and Jungian analytical psychology, "are based on an understanding of the dynamics of the patient's internal world" (p. 158). Psychoanalysis believes that the unresolved issues of individuals are often unconscious and can exert power over them. Within this approach there is a focus on both the past and the present, empathy is relied on heavily, and strengths are built on. Without going into a great deal of detail, I have found the following psychoanalytic concepts to be most helpful in my understanding of Travis: a) transference and counter-transference; b) attachment; c) the corrective emotional experience; and d) the transitional object, a concept developed by D.W. Winnicott, which refers to an object, such as a child's teddy bear, that stands for a fantasied tie to the mother but also "constitutes a special extension of the child's self, halfway between the mother that the child creates in subjective omnipotence and the mother that the child finds operating on her own...in the objective world" (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 128). In addition, and on another vein of psychoanalytic theory, is that of Jung's emphasis on the importance of symbolic content as a means of revealing hidden ideas (Rubin, 1999). The humanistic approaches "emphasize the acceptance and development of individuals in the present" (Rubin, 1999, p. 162). The humanist approaches also have in common an optimistic view

of human nature, focusing on the belief that human beings are engaged in a process of growth and development, and are responsible for their own fates (Rubin, 1999). More specifically, I have found myself often drawn to the person-centered or client-centered approach, which was developed by Carl Rogers. According to Natalie Rogers (2001), Carl Rogers' daughter, the person-centered approach "requires the therapist to be empathic, open, honest, congruent, and caring, as she listens in depth, and facilitates the growth of an individual" (p. 164). Another important element of this approach is how the therapist follows the client's lead, trusting that the client is aware of, and able to, take the appropriate path.

Sessions One and Two: The Beginning Exploration

My initial impression of Travis was that he was very friendly and smiled easily. He was very eager to participate in art therapy and agreed to all the conditions on the consent form with the exception of allowing me to audiotape him. I initially thought this was odd, but in retrospect I feel that Travis' insecurity surrounding his language disability played a large role in his desire not to be audio taped. Throughout the session, he appeared to be easily distracted, often changing topics of conversation dramatically, as well as continually standing up and down. I was unsure if his fidgeting was out of excitement, nerves, or because he was easily distracted. When I suggested he could make art, he told me how he loved to do origami and decided to show me how. He used lined paper from his own book, despite the fact that I had shown him the art supplies room with numerous types of paper, and proceeded to make an inflatable ball and a "football" triangle (Figure 1). Despite obvious difficulty, Travis remained focused and persevered through several attempts until successful. I was fascinated by the sharp contrast between

his fidgeting, easily distracted behaviour when we were talking and his deep concentration and perseverance when doing origami. After completing these first origami artworks, Travis quickly drew a dragon's head (not pictured), again on his own lined paper and using his own blue pen. He told me it was the mascot of the summer camp he went to every year.

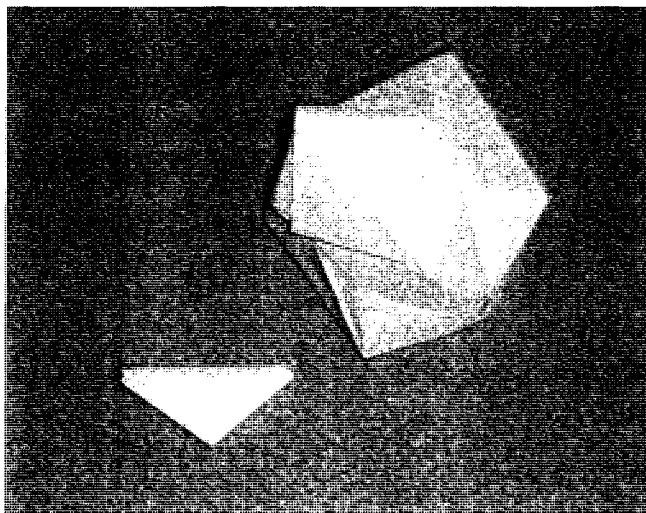


Figure 1. Origami inflatable ball and “football”, lined paper.

Travis was also quite eager to share information about himself with me; although, this information was mainly about his likes and dislikes. In particular, he told me how he loved playing pranks on people and explained an elaborate prank involving a motorized spider, which he was planning to play on the head teacher for April Fool's Day. In this first session, I felt from Travis a strong desire to connect with me, through his eagerness, his sharing of secret plans, and his warm smile and demeanor. I was pleased with this initial positive transference towards me. In addition, his insistence on using his own lined paper and his own pen made me feel that he was also hesitant or untrusting about the art materials I was providing him. It was as if he wanted to trust me, and what I was offering him, but he did not know me well enough to accept the materials I was offering. My

research paper advisor also mentioned the issue of control, and how using his own materials could reflect Travis' need for control over this new situation. In essence, perhaps he was keeping a safe distance while still demonstrating a positive transference reaction. I remember that my own counter-transference reaction was two-sided as well. I was simultaneously pleased with Travis' warmth and willingness, as well as confused by his use of his own art materials. Reflecting back on this first session, I am reminded of the invasive and chaotic interactions the school has had with Travis' mother and I wonder whether Travis' fear or hesitation was due to a fear of rejection or of engulfment, or perhaps due to a need to protect himself from me because he had no idea how I would react to him. Would I punish him for using the art materials? Did he deserve to use them? Would I value what he would make with them? I feel that Travis was testing me, as well as himself, and attempting to figure out who and how we would be together. In retrospect, this first session marks the very beginning of our therapeutic relationship and elements of transference and counter-transference were already apparent.

In our second session Travis explored using green plasticine, allowing his imagination to turn it into many different forms. This time, he was thoroughly engaged in the nonverbal and spoke only to narrate his process of creation and briefly label his fleeting creations. The green plasticine was first intended to be a tree (which never came into existence) but Travis quickly changed his mind and made a lizard for his brother for his birthday. Travis then squished the lizard and turned it into a dragon's head (the mascot of his summer camp), followed by a skull-like head, which quickly became a boat, and then a boat with a skull face. In the last several minutes, Travis finally ended with a duck boat (Figure 2). He worked with a great deal of freedom, energy, and

excitement, and I couldn't help but notice how Travis did not hesitate to squish one creation to make another. The process of creating symbols with this plasticine seemed more important than the final product. My own counter-transference reaction was initially that of surprise and mild panic as he continually created and destroyed his artwork. Looking back on it now, I realize that it was my need as an art therapy intern to document his artwork that incited this slightly panicked reaction. Fortunately, and despite my desire to document, I accompanied Travis on this parade of images. I realize now the importance of my standing back and enjoying as it allowed me to get caught up in his journey and his energy. It also allowed me to communicate to Travis my recognition acceptance of this journey. I feel that this parade of images, although appearing random, were a visual record of his train of thought as he attempted to tell me more about himself on a symbolic level.

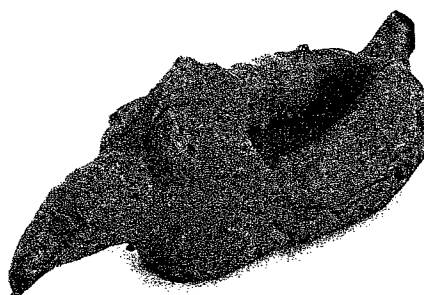


Figure 2. Duck boat, green plasticine.

In the session, I did not attempt to interpret his exploration nor the images that came out, however, in hindsight, I am amazed by their metaphorical power (Moon, 2007). I would like to preface this next section by saying that these are my own interpretations based on my knowledge of Travis and on my own orientation. In art

therapy, it is the clients' own interpretations or understanding of their artwork that is most important and valued. However, in this particular case, Travis did not share his interpretations or understanding with me, therefore I have taken the liberty to explore his artwork so as to better understand him and his art therapeutic journey. The tree, which was Travis' first intention never came to fruition; indeed, he could not or was unwilling to even begin it. The tree is a symbol with many levels of meaning. It is often seen as a link between the lower world (the underworld or hell), the middle world (earth), and the upper world (heaven) (Cirlot, 1971). Similarly, it is also seen as a symbol of the processes of life and death, as well as the evolution of "life transcending the ego" (Martin, 1999, p.110). I feel that perhaps the tree, as a strong symbol of connectedness, transcendence, and life was not ready or able to grow into a physical form, but could only remain as Travis' verbalization of his desire. A lizard for his brother followed and begins a theme of making art as gifts for his family that will reoccur throughout the course of his treatment, and will play a prominent role in sessions to come. I feel that his facility in making an image for his brother reflects Travis' facility in giving to his family. This was then squished, which I feel reflected ambivalent feelings towards his brother for destroying much of his precious items, and then replaced by a symbol precious to Travis, that of his camp's mascot, a dragon. The skull and skull-boat that followed make me think of his father, who is deceased, and with whom he can no longer have a connection. The skull is generally considered a symbol of physical death (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996). The boat, on the other hand, often symbolizes a container for safety, hope, confidence and transcendence (Olderr, 1986). In addition, it also is linked to voyaging or of a crossing made by the living or the departed (Chevalier & Gheerbrant). Due to these

associations, I wonder whether the eerie skull-boat, symbolic of death and of crossing, may have represented Travis' desire to cross the river of life and death to see his father again. However, this skull-boat felt as if it was a frightening image that could not carry Travis to his father. I feel that perhaps this image was too threatening to look at in our second session so Travis altered the skull at the helm of the boat into a much less-threatening duck. In retrospect, I wonder whether the apparition of the duck was a means of evading the power of the skull. As my research paper advisor pointed out, Travis literally "ducks out" of this issue of death. Indeed, in duck symbolism, emphasis is sometimes placed on how a duck dives and dips for many purposes, such as to avoid predators (De Vries, 1984). Furthermore, ducks can be symbolic of "freedom from worry" (De Vries, p. 150) but in a superficial manner, due to the fact that ducks often float about and preen. In this respect, I wonder if with the appearance of the duck indicated Travis' return to calm after evading the sadness and trauma of his father's death, which, after briefly emerging in the safe therapeutic space, was returned to the unconscious.

In this second session, Travis' mixture of silence and narration of his process made its first appearance. At the time I was unaware of how important this would play in our work together as it became a common occurrence in many of our sessions together. Upon reflection, I was struck with how Travis' habit of labeling and narrating placed even more emphasis on his artistic creations and his artistic process, as if he was confirming his accomplishments.

Sessions Three through Five: Gifts for his Family

In the following three sessions, I learned a great deal about Travis' relationship with his brothers and his mother as he made gifts for them and other items related to his family. In our third session Travis, again using a running narrative of his actions, chose oil pastels and told me he was going to colour a design onto a piece of paper, which he'd cover with black and then scratch a wolf head into it for his older brother's birthday. In order to keep the containment of our sessions in tact, I reminded Travis of the fact that he could not bring the image home until the end of art therapy. He did not seem to be bothered by this and continued to work. I felt that perhaps Travis was testing the safety and boundaries of space I was providing him and that it was important to the safety of the creative space for Travis to have the structure maintained. I feel that it highlighted that what he made in this space would be kept safe and honoured. As he coloured, Travis associated each colour chosen to a member of his family; blue and green for himself, gray for his older brother, red for his younger brother, purple for his mother; and the yellow remained unassociated to a person (this stage of creation is not pictured). Travis told me about the likes and dislikes of his big brother and what he was planning to put on this drawing. I reflected how well he knew his brother, which opened up a discussion about his brothers. He told me that his brothers teased and hurt him ("I'm not good with jokes"), and how they just don't listen to him or understand him. He told me that when they "bug him" he often just leaves the house and goes outside to skateboard. He told me how much he wanted to "get back at them" so that they would understand how much they hurt him. In retrospect, I find it interesting how the pranks Travis liked to play on other people are reminiscent of how his brothers treated him. In this respect it is as if Travis

was identifying with his brother, as the aggressor, and acting out that role onto other people. However, Travis still demonstrated hope about his relationship with his brothers and added that, “when they grow up they’ll like me then”. In addition, Travis mentioned how his mom had asked him to change his “bad attitude” with his brothers, and that he has tried but it doesn’t work. Travis ended the session by carefully covering up the colours with black paint. In retrospect this action felt as if he was covering up his family dynamics with the black paint. As if this colourful design of colours, which I feel represents all the hopes he has for a stronger and more animate family relationship, needed to be blackened or hidden because it did not represent his reality. In this respect, Travis’ use of black is reminiscent of a common understanding of the colour black as symbolic of the absence of life and good (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996). However, the colour black is multifaceted and can also symbolize the earth, as well as beginnings (Chevalier & Gheerbrant). Within this symbolism, I feel that perhaps my initial view of Travis’ act of covering the colours with black was too simple. I now wonder if perhaps the black is like the earth and is covering these colours, which represent his family, and allowing them to germinate and grow into a new beginning.

In the fourth session Travis came in motivated to make origami, and therefore did not continue the gift for his brother. Using several sheets of the largest size of white paper, he folded several origami objects (Figure 3). The first was a large folded square, with dizzying black lines drawn on it. He then made a large flower full of sharp-looking triangular petals, reminiscent of little teeth or a Venus flytrap. After the flower, he made a heart, which he eagerly told me his mother had shown him how to make. He placed the heart on the table and then changed his mind and stood the heart up inside the toothy

flower. Finally, he attempted to make a large boat but, after repeated failure, he turned it into a plane with a bomb on it, which he quickly discarded. However, he returned to the table and attempted to make the boat again but on a smaller scale, and this time he succeeded. Interestingly his verbal discourse again consisted of a running narrative of his origami process and a reiteration of his difficulty with his brothers; however, the artwork seemed to me to be speaking metaphorically of his relationship with his mother. As previously mentioned, it appears as if his own attachment to his mother has been chaotic and inconsistent. I feel that the reality of this “thorny” attachment relationship was symbolically shown to me by Travis in this session when he made the toothy origami flower and the heart; both of which he was shown how to do by his mother. After completing the two he placed the heart into the toothy flower.

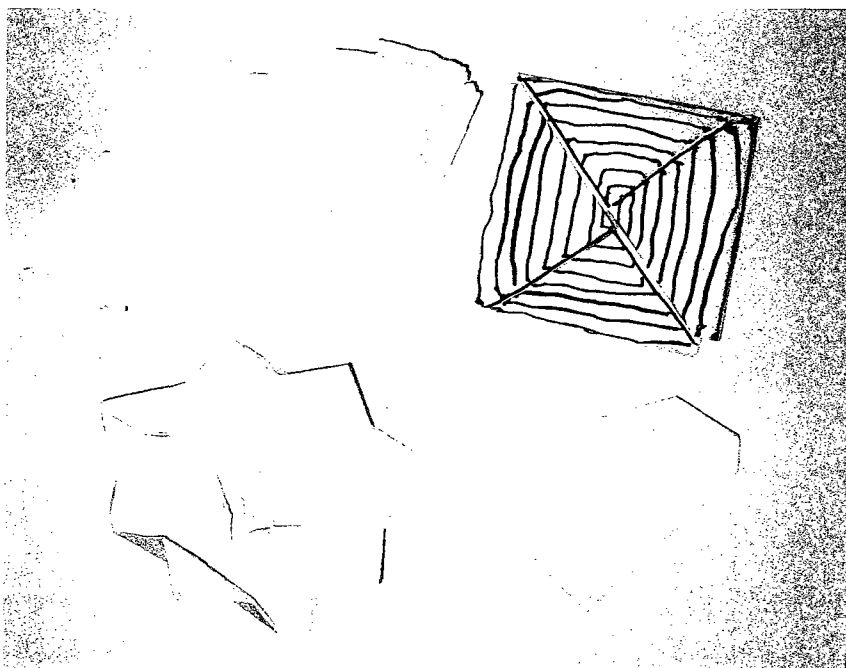


Figure 3. Origami boat, square with black lines, flower, and heart; white paper.

I remember how my stomach lurched a bit as he did so. I was worried about the safety of this precious heart as it sat precariously in the toothy mouth of this aggressive

and thorny looking flower. I feel that this initial, visceral reaction was due to the connection I drew between the toothy flower and the image of the vagina dentata. In myths and religions around the world the image of the vagina denata, or toothed vagina, is quite common and is often said to express man's unconscious fear of the power of the vagina (Walker, 1988). After consulting the symbolism of flowers, I have also found a connection between flowers and the vulva, due, in part, to a similarity of form as well as popular metaphors for the sexual act such as "deflower" and "plucking flowers" (De Vries, 1984). Now turning my attention to the heart, as the centre of the body it is often associated with the soul, the will, the intellect, and the actions of the person (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996). In addition, the heart is considered to be the place where a person's "life-essence", as well as their emotions, is found (De Vries). In this respect, I feel that the heart was a representation of Travis and made me wonder how Travis, and his heart, has felt in the hands of his mother. I feel that this difficult or unsafe attachment is also echoed in Travis' construction of a boat, which I have noted previously can be symbolic of a container for safety, hope, confidence and transcendence (Olderr, 1986). However, Olderr has also likened the boat to a woman's womb, as the feminine symbol of containment, as well as a cradle. In this respect, I feel that the origami boat Travis persisted in making could be seen as his attempt to create a safe maternal space for himself.

Travis returned to his brother's gift in the following (fifth) session (Figure 4 – I have chosen to include a detail of the artwork in order to maintain confidentiality). After scratching one line into the blackened image he looked at me and said, "This is going to work". Using this scratching technique, he filled the page with his brother's name,

initials, things he thought his brother would like, as well as some drawings of things Travis himself liked. He began scratching using his keys but when this proved awkward, asked for a paperclip. Since I did not have paper clips in the art closet, I suggested other tools of which Travis chose a wooden tool for sculpting clay. As he scratched into the image, narrating his process the entire time, I experienced a sense of hope and discovery. Perhaps this was due to my own counter-transference as I remembered the first time I used this technique as a child. Or perhaps, it was the feeling of excitement I could sense in Travis as he realized that “This is going to work”.

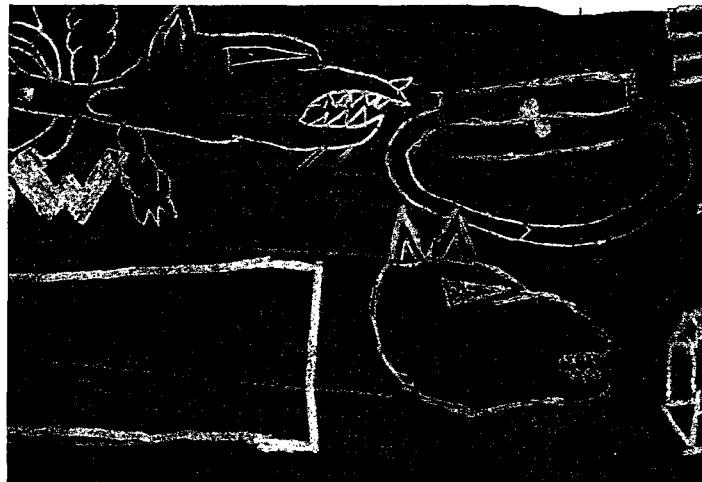


Figure 4. Detail of gift to older brother, oil pastels and black paint.

I feel that the act of scratching into the black and revealing the colour beneath, was symbolic of Travis discovering a means of connecting with his family and this happier or idealized version of them. Through scratching into the black he was revealing what was underneath, perhaps uncovering the possibilities that lay beneath the black. I feel that his sense of needing to connect to his family in a positive way was further emphasized by Travis' addition of parts of himself (things he liked) into his brother's drawing. For instance, for his brother he scratched the image of a wolf's head, and for

himself, the head of a dragon (his camp's mascot). He told me that he was going to make one for everyone in his family and fill each drawing with things that each person liked. I feel that these gifts acted as peace offerings for his brothers and mother, in hopes that they would repair their relationship and make them happy. In addition, as I look back on this session, I wonder whether Travis was also offering gifts to me, in the form of his artwork, as a means of thanking me for was offering him a safe space where he could be creative and where he was not seen as the "trouble maker". Due to the omnipresence of his family in these first sessions, I feel that Travis could not or would not separate his own sense of self from that of his negative role within the family as the source of their problems. He seemed to take the responsibility of repairing this family rift on his own because, in his mind, it was his own "bad attitude" that was to blame.

Sessions Six through Eight: Origami Animal Farm

In the follow three sessions Travis continued to use origami to explore the themes of family dynamics and his desire to make them gifts. I feel that this fixation of medium and theme (gifts for the family) reflected Travis' continual process of attempting to atone for his "bad attitude", create peace in his household, and, consequently achieve the more harmonious family dynamic he desired. Through consultation with my supervisors I decided to bring in a book of origami designs, presented as a new art therapy tool, that I felt Travis would like. I feel that this desire to provide for Travis reflected my own positive counter-transference towards him; I wanted to provide for and nurture him like a mother, but decided to do so in a manner I thought was appropriate for an art therapist. I feel that this nurturing gesture was a very important move in our therapeutic relationship because it showed Travis that I was thinking of him outside of our sessions. In addition, it

also allowed Travis to further develop a maternal transference towards me. In this respect, Travis perhaps felt both special as well as held and understood by me. Travis was thrilled with the book; he had a huge smile and feigned stealing it. He spent the whole session flipping through the pages and telling me what he would make and for which member of his family. In the last 15 minutes he finally decided to make a box and a dragon's head with pink construction paper (Figure 5). He had some difficulty but persevered through it and was thrilled with the results. He told me he wanted to take the dragon's head with him to give to his older brother but I reminded of our rules about artwork, again placing firm boundaries around the freedom of our sessions.

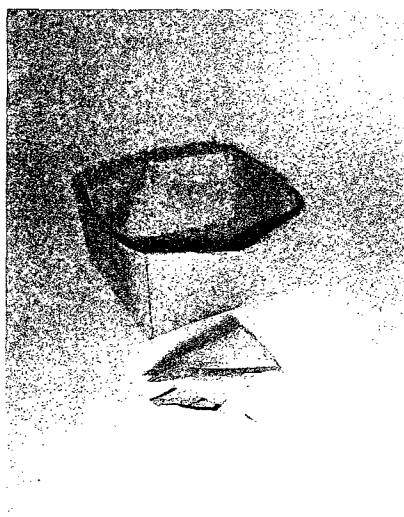


Figure 5. Origami box and dragon's head, pink construction paper.

I must admit that as Travis spent many minutes in the following sessions just flipping through the pages, and the origami continued into session seven with a horse and helicopter (Figure 6), and session eight with a bear (Figure 7), I began to regret my decision. At those moments of doubt, I feared that I had inadvertently colluded with Travis and fostered his obsession with origami and making gifts for his family. I now see that this fear was a counter-transference reaction instigated by my own insecurities as an

art therapy intern. I had been afraid that I had involuntarily stalled our therapeutic process through colluding with Travis. Fortunately, as seen shortly, Travis did move on to other materials and themes. I now realize that in those instances where Travis returned to origami it was in moments of sadness and frustration. I feel that for Travis, origami was a security blanket; he was comfortable with it, felt safe with it, and therefore he used it as a means of communicating with me until he felt safe enough to move to other materials.

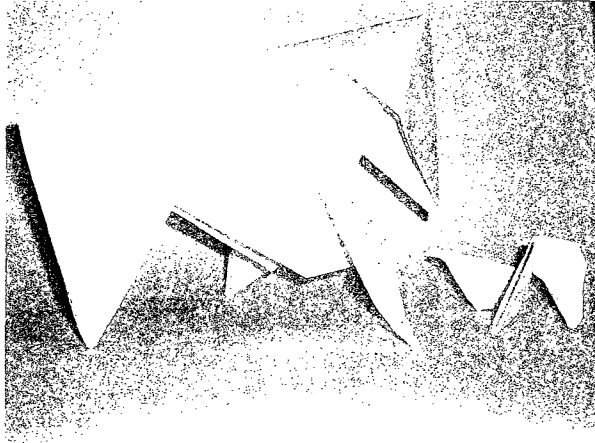


Figure 6. Origami horse and helicopter, white paper.

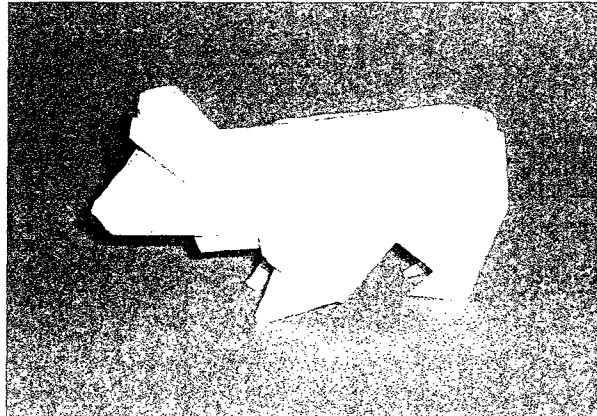


Figure 7. Origami bear, white paper.

A very positive outcome of the origami book was the strengthening of my therapeutic relationship Travis. At the beginning of our seventh session, Travis quickly showed me an origami mouse (Figure 8) he had made outside of therapy and had placed

in the art therapy room. It is important to note here that the art therapy room is also the student lounge, which all the students have access to during recess and lunch, although the art supplies and artworks are secured in a locked closet. The origami mouse Travis made sat on top of a small cupboard overlooking the table we worked on. I had the sense that Travis' joy in being thought of by me outside of therapy, and his maternal transference towards me, translated into this tiny origami mouse that stood over our following sessions. I feel that this little mouse was simultaneously a gift to me, a sign of his budding affection and his vulnerability or sense of feeling small, as well as a witness to my being good to him. This little origami mouse took some bumps and bruises as it got continually knocked off the shelf week to week by other students in the day to day life of the school but, every week, Travis and I would pick it up and put it back into its rightful space. I feel that Travis was looking for a safe and consistent place to be, and I feel that the origami mouse symbolically demonstrated this need for a safe attachment and his maternal transference towards me.

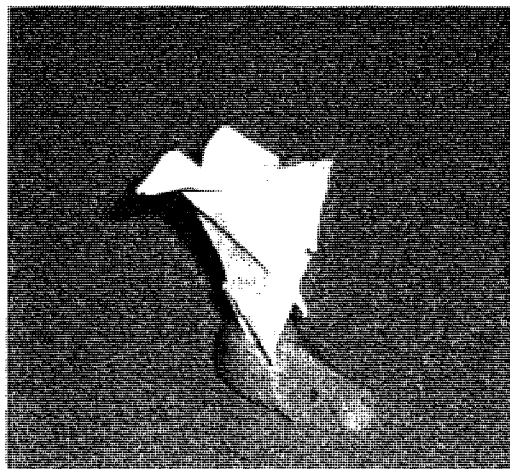


Figure 8. Origami mouse, lined paper.

Finally, the origami also gave Travis the opportunity to work on his problem solving skills and perseverance, which are important resilient characteristics (Camilleri,

2007; Hauser & Allen, 2006). This is epitomized in session eight when Travis arrived with instructions on how to make an origami bear which he had found on the Internet. He told me that he had tried to make it at home for his mom but it did not work so he wanted to try again with me. He spent the whole session completing the origami bear with my gentle guidance (Figure 7). Travis was pleased with himself when the bear was completed and told me he was going to bring it home. I again reminded him about the rules concerning artwork made in art therapy. I also pointed out that the instructions were his so he could make one at home, but that he just needed to remember what we did if he had difficulty. Perhaps due to Travis' assertion that the bear was his mother's favourite animal and that this origami bear would be a gift for her, I had a feeling that this bear was symbolic of his mother. In consulting symbol dictionaries, I found that the bear is often associated with violence, as well as the dangerous aspects of a person's unconscious (Biedermann, 1992). In addition, bears are often symbolic of the representation of the Terrible Mother but also a fiercely protective mother that demonstrates "ferocity in the protection of kindred" (De Vries, 1984, p. 38). These associations make me wonder if the origami bear was a representation of Travis' mother as he has internalized her. At home with his mother Travis was unable to succeed at making the origami bear but with my help, as an ideal mother in this transference relationship, he could. In wanting to bring this origami bear home, I wonder if Travis was expressing his desire to bring the memory of me, as the ideal mother, to his home where his real mother resides.

Session Nine: Reaching Out to Peers

At this point in therapy, Travis took an important step in his therapeutic process as he left origami and his family aside. Although the theme of connecting with others is

still apparent, in session nine, Travis now focused on connecting with other adolescents. He showed me a drawing of a cartoon butterfly another student had drawn and he had offered to colour; doing artistic favours such as drawing for others or colouring the artwork of others is something Travis did often. He got a large white paper, a pencil, and pencil crayons and told me he felt like drawing. As he drew a large butterfly, he told me of his idea to collect other people's drawings and copy them, but also make them different by adding more details and patterns. I reflected that he wanted to make them his own. He drew his own butterfly with a pencil very quickly and freely (Figure 9). He then started adding intricate patterns to the wings, which would begin as a specific pattern but would quickly be abstracted by short cuts so he could finish faster. When completed he told me he wasn't going to colour it because he "wouldn't know what colour to use". However, he insisted on spending the last 10 minutes of our session colouring his classmate's butterfly drawing despite my encouragement to him to finish his own image.

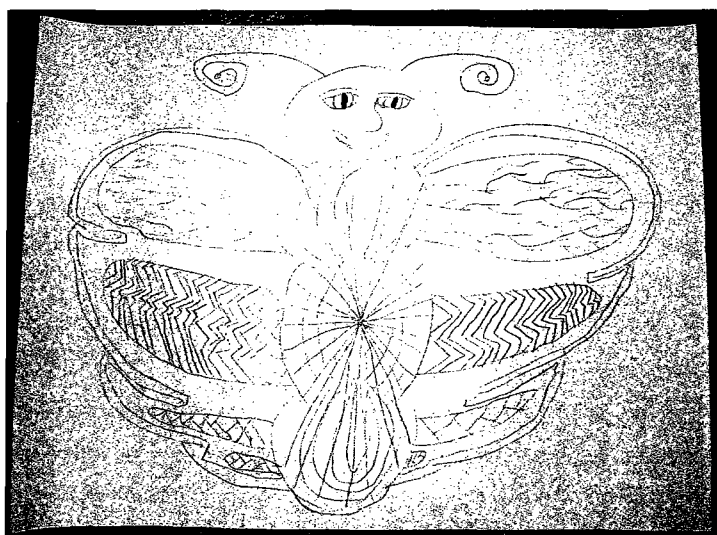


Figure 9. Butterfly, pencil on white paper.

Looking back on this moment now, I feel that my decision to encourage him to continue his own image was perhaps due to my desire to see him focus on himself and his

own desires, instead of focusing on others and doing what they expect or demand of him. However, when Travis insisted on completing his classmate's image, I feel as if perhaps it was an indication of his separating from me, as his ideal mother figure, and asserting the importance of the wishes of his peers over the wishes of a maternal figure. In addition, within this session Travis only spoke briefly of his desire to see his mother more. Again, when I look back on this session I also feel as if Travis was trying to find a means of fitting himself into relationships with others, which I feel is aptly symbolized by his altering drawings of others. In this respect, it is as if Travis is trying to figure out how or who he may be with others.

Session Ten: Our First Break and the Mouse Finds a Home

Because it was our last session before the Christmas break, Travis was allowed to take home the artwork he made that day. He made an origami box out of red paper and drew 'flash green' ribbons on it with dry pastels (not pictured). As he worked on his box, he told me how he had found stones outside and was carving images into them of his family's favourite animals as Christmas gifts. He also talked about how much he liked the camp he goes to in the summer but that sometimes he gets kicked out because of his "anger issues". He told me that he walks away now when people make him angry, except when they say something about his dad. I reflected how it must be painful when people say bad things about his dad, especially because he was dead. As we were cleaning up, Travis found his origami mouse on the floor and brought it to the art closet and placed it on one of the shelves inside. I feel that the plight of this mouse also mirrored Travis' home life, in which he had to deal with the constant bullying of his older brother, which often seemed to involve physical harm and the destruction of his property. Within this

chaotic and destructive living environment, Travis does not seem to be protected by his mother who was very busy with numerous jobs and three sons, and what is more, he was reduced to living in a small “hole” and hiding his stuff from ruination. Therefore, I would like to think that this origami mouse was searching for a safe place to call home, a place where he did not have to worry about being knocked off the shelf or destroyed by others. In session ten, right before Christmas break, Travis decided to put the origami mouse into the locked art closet, where I safely keep his other artwork. I found this gesture to be very important and it made me feel warm, happy, and privileged.

Session Eleven: Death and Angels

Perhaps due to Travis’ growing trust in me now that I had returned from our break, a remarkable change occurred after Christmas break in regards to the themes, symbols, and metaphors expressed in his artwork. After Travis excitedly told me about his favourite Christmas gift, he got paper and oil pastels out of the art closet. He decided to draw characters from an Internet cartoon series his brother had shown him (Figure 10). This Internet cartoon series seemed to have affected him greatly, as Travis spent the entire session focusing on them both visually and verbally. In addition, he expressed intense emotions (sadness, anger, frustration, disappointment) in relation to this series. The series, called D.N. Angels, was about a boy who had a dark and light angel in him that were passed down for generations from father to son. The dark and light angels are opposites but they become friends and learn to work together to give the boy special powers. Travis told me that at the end of the series the light and dark angels in the boy die and the boy is left alone. I reflected how lonely and sad the boy might feel. He told me how he was so angry by the ending that he is planning to write to the show to tell them to

bring the angels back. Travis' drawings were of the main character of the show and the title of the show. He then spontaneously drew a third drawing of a sign for his camp (Figure 10).

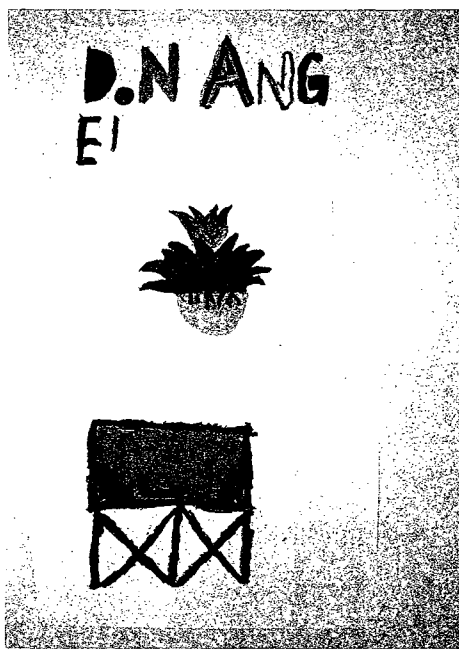


Figure 10. D.N. Angel characters and camp sign, oil pastels on white paper.

The themes of death and mourning were being expressed in Travis' artwork and in his recounting of this show, which had affected him greatly. I could not help but feel that this was Travis' way of addressing his father's death in an indirect and less threatening way (Linesch, 1988; Moon, 1998; Riley, 2003). By speaking through the very rich story of D.N. Angels Travis expressed very deep feelings of sadness, injustice, legacy, and the duality of individuals in which there can be both good and bad. Similarly, I recognized the importance of staying within Travis' metaphor (Linesch; Moon, 2007). My own counter-transference to this session is mainly that of reverence at Travis opening up to me so deeply on a metaphorical level. I felt like I was holding something incredibly precious and delicate in this session. I also remember feeling as if I didn't want to breathe

to hard for fear that I would break the preciousness of what Travis had communicated. I wonder if perhaps this sense of fear was due to Travis' transference towards me; a reaction to his apprehension in disclosing these deep emotions and thoughts with me.

Session Twelve: Travis!

Session twelve heralded in the beginning of Travis' acceptance of himself. Travis spontaneously decided to use a wood burner to burn his name into a small piece of wood. He repeatedly pressed hard with the burner to produce bold, dark lines. In retrospect, it was as if he was burning his existence into the wood; boldly stating that 'Travis' was there and was not going to leave or fade away. He then used markers to outline his name and colour the rest of the wood (Figure 11 is a reproduction I created on paper in order to preserve Travis' confidentiality).



Figure 11. "Travis", paper reproduction.

Looking back on it now, I feel that the addition of colours was a means of drawing attention to the importance of his name, and consequently, producing a powerful statement of self. On the request of his mother and the school, I broached the topic of Travis' father. When the school approached me with this request I initially was afraid that it may be a mistake, however, I felt that after our last session Travis was perhaps ready to begin to address this topic. He told me that his father died of lung cancer a long time ago, but he didn't remember much. He also told me that he was still sad about his father's

death, but that it was good because now his mom wasn't yelling all the time. He then told me how he had wanted to keep his dad's medical book so that he could see if his father had been diagnosed ADD as well. I reflected Travis' desire to have a connection to his father through this diagnosis. Travis agreed but stated that he'll never know because "they burned it". He continued talking about his dad without my encouragement, and was able to communicate when he had "had enough" by switching topics. I respected his change of direction but looking back on it now I wonder if I should have continued. Again, my own counter-transference reaction was that of fear of harming Travis or our therapeutic relationship. Perhaps this reaction was a sign of my own maternal counter-transference as I wanted to be his good/ideal mother and protect him from further hurt.

Sessions Thirteen through Sixteen: Presents to Himself

In the thirteenth session, Travis was enthralled by a piece of cardboard covered in red velvet he found among the art supplies. He told me that he wanted to make a book cover for his grid paper (Figure 12). Travis worked silently and with a lot of concentration. He used black and brown markers to colour the edges of the red velvet to make it look more "special" and "old". We explored the connection between his and his father's love for constructing things. He told me that his dad never got to finish building a wall in their house, so he would like to one day get the materials and finish it himself. For the following two sessions Travis continued to work on his book cover. In session fourteen he added more colour and details to the inside covers of the book as he talked about being part of the new boys group, as well as how he tried to do tricks using fire like his older brother but ended up just setting things on fire. Finally, in session fifteen, Travis used a black marker to draw the dragon mascot and nickname of his camp on the red

velvet (Figure 12). He also painstakingly poked holes in the book cover and bound them using pieces of metal wire. The book was so securely bound that it could not close properly. In addition, the sharp wire scratched Travis' fingers, thus highlighting its potential to be dangerous. I wonder whether this strong yet potentially dangerous connection indicated how Travis felt both the awareness of his need for attachment but also an awareness of the potential danger of being close to another human being.

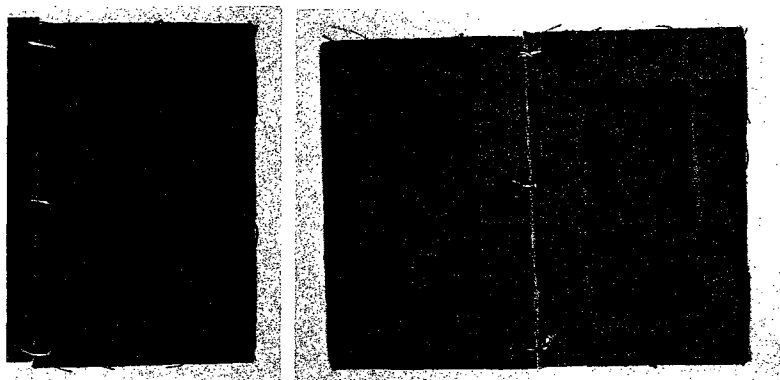


Figure 12. Book cover front detail (left) and inside (right), red velvet on cardboard with markers and wire.

During this session Travis was extremely quiet and only spoke to narrate what he was doing or to point out a mistake he had made. He also briefly mentioned that he might give the book to a girl he knew who lost her poetry book. I reflected how kind that was but added that he had spent so much time on it that it might be hard to let go. He agreed and said, "I'll probably keep it". The gifts to himself continued in session sixteen as Travis worked on finding a creative way to transform a gold-toned gold chain he had found in a bag of donated art supplies (Figure 13). He had wanted to steal the chain but knew that he could not have it unless it was part of an artwork. He used small coloured wires and unsuccessfully attempted to make friendship bracelets using the chain. Due to his difficulty, he decided to put them away and use another art media. He chose the

familiar medium of origami, making an inflatable ball (Figure 13). As he worked, we talked about how he wanted to see his mother more often, and he had not minded moving to the small storage room because she had needed the space.

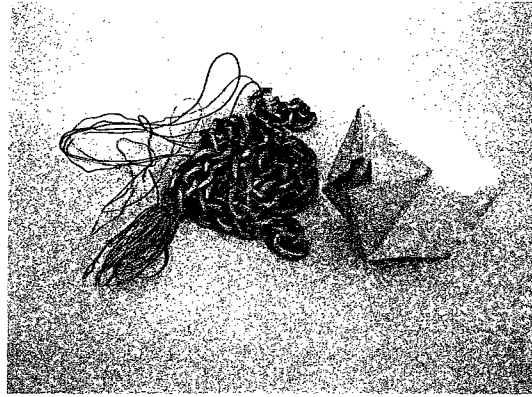


Figure 13. Gold-toned chain, wire, and inflatable paper ball.

I feel that Travis' gifts to himself were an important step in his discovery of his own identity and his pride in himself. The beautifully and securely made book (Figure 12) was made with a great deal of dedication and love. However, I also found it quite interesting how the velvet book was fastened together. The metal wire used to bind them is rough and sharp, and inhibits the book from being closed. I find this to be very poignant therapeutic metaphor (Moon, 2007). Travis' own relationship to his mother and to other people was often quite difficult and precarious. However, as the book demonstrates, this type of attachment would be dysfunctional, as the book does not close, and perhaps was even harmful.

Session Seventeen: Our Second Break and the "Laser"

Prior to this session, the head teacher had told me that Travis had had "a hard week". As he got out his art supplies, Travis told me he was having a hard time at home because "I have to do everything!" He told me that he gets bossed around and his older brother keeps beating up on him. He said he that blamed himself and his "bad attitude."

He added that he was trying very hard to change. In this session (the last before March break), Travis was allowed to take home the session's artwork. Using a bouquet holder Travis decided to make a laser that would reflect coloured light when a beam of light was shone through it (Figure 14). He was very selective with what materials he used to adorn his "colour light laser"; finally deciding on a selection of beads that he attached with wire. The colour light laser was incredibly well built and strong. However, when I asked Travis what he had planned for his colour light laser when he took it home, he told me about how he could fix it "if it breaks". Despite his description of his artwork as a colour light laser, it looked remarkably like a rattle and, when shaken, it sounded like a rattle as well.



Figure 14. Colour light laser, plastic bouquet holder, wire, and beads.

Respecting Travis' metaphor and not wanting to commit imagicide (Moon, 1998), I chose not to reflect this resemblance to Travis. Looking back on this session, I feel that a part of the 'colour light laser' reflects a desire for nurturance as it looks remarkably like a rattle, an object that is often given to little babies when they cry as a means of soothing them and to make them feel better. It does not escape my attention that he made this rattle

before our second break, a time in which Travis perhaps needed to be soothed. What is even more interesting, is how much care Travis took to make the ‘colour light laser’/rattle strong. As I watched him work, I couldn’t help but feel as if he was attempting to repair his own maternal attachment and make it as strong as he needed it to be. In addition, in informing me how he could fix it “if it breaks”, I feel that Travis was informing me how he could survive the “destruction” that was often present in his own home life.

Sessions Eighteen through Twenty: Remember Me

In the following sessions Travis created a logo for the school (Figure 15) as a means of leaving a part of him behind. This project was spurred on by the possibility that he might be transferred to a high school specialized in training students in a trade. In the eighteenth session Travis used masking tape to block off the logo’s shape. He worked very hard and was incredibly focused. In that session he also coloured the central part black with oil pastels outlining his school’s initials (the initials have been blacked out in Figure 15 in order to preserve confidentiality). He was quite talkative as well, telling me about his Big Brother, his speech therapist, his frustration at not being understood, and about his anger and frustration at the possibility of being sent to a trade school. I reflected how perhaps Travis felt like he had no control over the decision to switch schools. Travis agreed and added that the school had told his mom first, and left him completely out of the loop. In session nineteen, Travis continued his school logo but switched to paint because it covered quicker. He was very careful not to waste the paint and was meticulous with his brush strokes, telling me how they had to go in the same direction. He often repeated haphazardly, “I think it’s going to work” or “I think it’s going to look

good”. I reflected his hard work, his concentration, and his desire to make it perfect. We talked about how he wanted to leave his mark on the school if he had to leave next year.

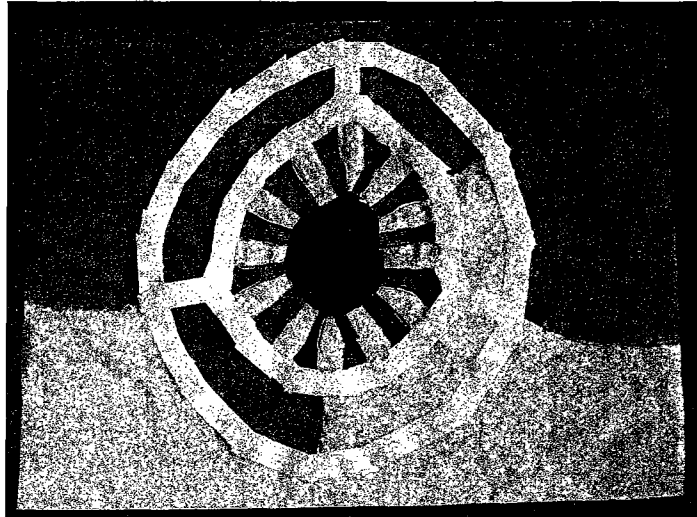


Figure 15. School logo, paint and oil pastels on paper.

In the twentieth session the end of his logo making process began as he carefully removed the tape to reveal the final image. He was very excited about this part of the process but became upset when some of the tape tore the paper. At first I tried to soothe him, again due to my maternal counter-transference, which emerged as a desire to shield him from further hurt. Then I began to reflect his frustration and sadness, and how I thought it was because he wanted to make it perfect for the school. He agreed with me, and from that moment he began to say, “I like it” and “it’s good”. I wonder if, in reflecting Travis’ pain and frustration back to him, Travis was then able to accept the pain and move away from it. In addition, Travis began to think of ways that he could ‘fix’ the torn spots as he made some changes to the logo. With these changes he was much less perfectionistic and ridged; not disturbed by accidental smudges and mess. I feel that this school logo showed that Travis was beginning to think of how he wanted to be remembered by his peers and teachers in the school he might have to leave. He also

worked through his feeling of having no control and, with the school staff's support, became more active in his decision to leave or stay; understanding that he was now being given the power to decide.

Session Twenty-One: A Precious Discovery

With only two more sessions remaining until the end of treatment, Travis entered session twenty-one with a definite plan to work with plasticine. He worked the plasticine in his hands and told me he would use a piece of white paper as the base for his sculpture. Suddenly his eyes lit up and he said, "I have an idea!" He told me he was going to make a rock on the paper surrounded by dirt, and that he would write his name in the rock using his ring to make the impression of a lizard (Figure 16). He was very focused and worked diligently to make sure that the gray rock was adequately round, smooth, and flat. He even used one of the clay tools to form the edges into a perfect oval, as well as to bevel the edges. He used his lizard ring, rolling it with pressure to get a continuous line of lizards, to spell out the first three letters of his name. He then took brown plasticine and began to add dirt, smoothing it up and around the rock. He spontaneously smoothed out his name and told me he would add it at home. As a final step, he used his lizard ring to imprint a lizard design on the dirt around the rock. He told me it was a fossil, or something old or Egyptian that was hidden. I reflected the preciousness of the rock and he agreed. He added that if his name on the rock got broken or ruined he would put a picture of his father in it.

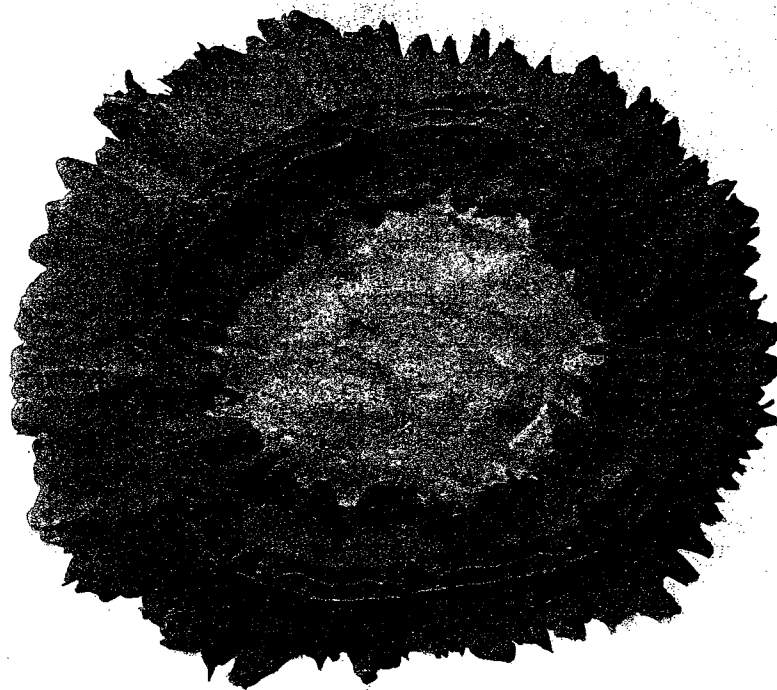


Figure 16. Lizard-imprinted fossil, plasticine on paper.

Throughout the session, Travis talked almost non-stop about his day, his pranks, his decision about next year, his older brother being mad at him again, and having all his files erased off the computer “by accident” by this older brother. This session felt as if Travis was preparing himself for the end, but also wanted to show me metaphorically how we had uncovered or unearthed something very precious in our months together. At the time, I had been focused on his reference to his father, but in retrospect, I feel that the rock Travis was uncovering was a symbolic representation of his forming identity. Within this new identity, an image of his father can be found, and it adds to the preciousness of this discovery.

Sessions Twenty-Two and Twenty Three: Packing Up and Saying Goodbye

I had begun to prepare Travis for termination quite early in the therapeutic process; first mentioning our final date at Christmas break in our tenth session. However,

it was only after spring break in our seventeenth session that we began to count down the weeks. On the day of our second-to-last session, Travis found me in the art therapy room/student lounge during recess; he was frowning and seemed upset. I asked him if he was all right, and he said “so-so” and then told me that he had lost his blue diamond earring that he always wore in his left ear. Later that day, as our second-to-last session began, his mood had changed. He seemed less sad and showed me a map that he had drawn. He told me that it was his route to school and he was hoping to retrace his steps and find his blue diamond earring. Perhaps the act of making a map and devising a plan soothed him and made him more determined and focused on his goal. He also said that the other kids were teasing him about it. I reflected how special the earring must be and he agreed, saying that it was his mother’s and that she had given it to him because blue was his favourite colour. I feel that the importance of this earring lies in the fact that it was a gift from his mother that made Travis feel like she thought of him and valued him. Travis had often had things taken away by his mother (his room, video game privileges, her time) and this was a physical object that concretely proved to Travis that his mother loved him. I felt that in seeking me out prior to the session and sharing this with me, Travis was demonstrating how he valued my presence as someone who would listen to him, and wouldn’t tease or belittle him because I understood the importance of the earring.

After this exchange, Travis’ switched gears completely and went to the art supply closet and said, in a resolved manner, “We’ll get everything out so I can choose”. I got his artwork out from boxes and portfolios and he helped me carry them to the table. As he arranged his artwork from the past twenty-one sessions, Travis was smiling and would make little comments about them – “Ah! Look at all origami!” and “I made so much!”. I

feel as if Travis' maternal transference was in play at this moment as well. It reminded me of a child showing his artwork to his mother, knowing that he will get her attention, as well as her admiration and acceptance of his creations. However, he also began to express concern that he would not be able to get them all home and again made a comment about having to choose. I gently reminded Travis that all the artwork he made with me belonged to him and that he could take them all home if he wanted to because it was his decision. In this way I was trying to encourage Travis yet again to take control over the events in his life and make decisions for himself (Camilleri, 2007; Hauser, 2006). Travis smiled and told me he would take it all home. This session felt quite frantic and I felt as if I was on a roller coaster ride with Travis as he, with great enthusiasm and motivation, looked at his art and worked very diligently at finding the best and safest way to transport his artwork home. Perhaps this "roller coaster" feeling was amplified by my own counter-transference related to this difficult ending as a part of me did not want to leave him and was hoping this ending could be slowed down. When all his artwork couldn't fit in a large bag Travis, forever problem-solving, exclaimed, "I know, I'll make it into a box!" and he quickly took the portfolio apart and began folding it into a box (Figure 17). He secured all but two of his artworks; he told me that the next week he would bring home the plasticine rock (Figure 16) and give the logo (Figure 15) to the head teacher. I feel that the box, as a symbol of containment and protection (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996), was quite powerful and meaningful, especially in this penultimate session with Travis.

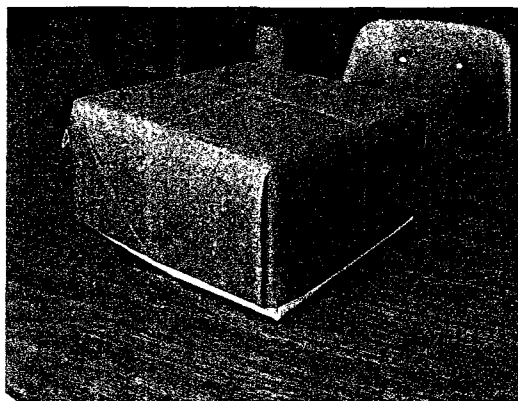


Figure 17. Origami box, bristol board.

As he worked, I asked a few questions such as “Do you have a favourite? Which one?” to which he answered, “the name tag...the duck...the rock...” (eventually naming all of his artwork). In response to another question, Travis told me he would not change a thing on any of them. Finally, I asked him how he might keep all his artwork safe at his home, since he had told me before that his brother likes to break his stuff. Travis told me his plan, which he had been thinking of before, to hide them behind his small dresser or at the back of his closet. I feel that perhaps, my reasoning behind that final question lay in my own counter-transference due to my guilt in leaving him. I wanted to know that Travis’ artworks, as expressions of himself and treasures to both Travis and myself, would be safe in his home environment that often proved unsafe. As we chatted amiably about his artwork and some day-to-day topics, such as television shows, I randomly made a comment about time machines. Travis’ face lit up and he said “If I had a time machine, I’d go back and change things so my mom wouldn’t hate me so much!” He said he’d also stop his dad from smoking so he wouldn’t die, and that he’d get perfect grades on his tests so that “then things would be perfect”. When I look back on this moment, I am reminded of how I had felt like a deer in headlights, completely frozen and unsure what to do or say. This was the first time Travis had opened up verbally so freely about these

feelings and I felt privileged to have him share it with me. However, I also felt the finality in his statement, that now that it had been said Travis did not want to go back to it. I reflected back his desire to change things, but respected his silence after and held this heavy and meaningful disclosure. Perhaps I could have continued to explore this disclosure with him but, at the time in our second to last session, I felt that it was more important that I refrain from opening this painful topic too widely. I feel that throughout our months together Travis had consistently used his artwork and his words or stories to metaphorically address some of the trauma of his past and the difficulties of his present. In this second-to-last session, Travis seemed to have felt ready to verbally express what he had, to date, only approached nonverbally.

Our final session together began with a bang as Travis jumped out from behind the door and screamed “Boo!” to scare me. Indeed, I jumped a bit and then started laughing, commenting on how he had wanted to do that for a while. He laughed hard and was smiling ear to ear; he told me “now you can’t get me back!!!” I feel that this was a creative way for Travis to address our last session. From the very first session, he had told me how much he liked to pull pranks and he had playfully threatened to prank me on April Fool’s Day. However, in doing so in our last session Travis was playfully punishing me for leaving and pointing out how I could not “get him back” because I would be gone. I feel he was also seeing if I, as an adult figure, could handle his prank and not retaliate.

As my ending ritual, I had decided to make cookies for the adolescents I worked with. I saw the cookies as a nurturing gesture, although I realize now how I was playing into my transference role of “good mother”. Travis was thrilled with the cookies and told me “they taste almost like the ones my mom used to make...she hasn’t made them in a

while”. He ate all five that I had placed on his plate while he used markers to make two final drawings. His first drawing that session was of his camp’s mascot holding a banner with the camp’s name on it (Figure 18, the name of the camp has been covered in order to protect confidentiality). Looking back on it now, I am reminded of how Travis drew his camp’s mascot in our very first session but using his own paper and pen. This time around he used the paper and markers I provided for him. He also added much more colour and details. I feel that this image also reflects his next positive step after our time together. Travis has always referred to his camp as a special place for him and I feel that by redoing this mascot image using materials I have provided for him, he is essentially connecting that special place with the special place I had provided for him during the school year.

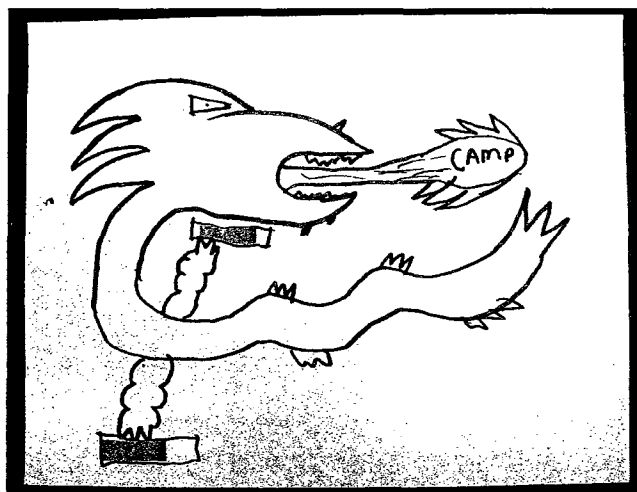


Figure 18. Camp dragon mascot, marker on white paper.

Travis’ final image in our final session was of a red rose, with a green stem and leaves surrounded by grass, drawn using markers (Figure 19). In his usual manner, Travis did not say much about the meaning of his drawing but he did tell me that when he had

started the drawing he did not know what it was going to be. While Travis drew this flower, I was struck with how beautiful and alive it was.

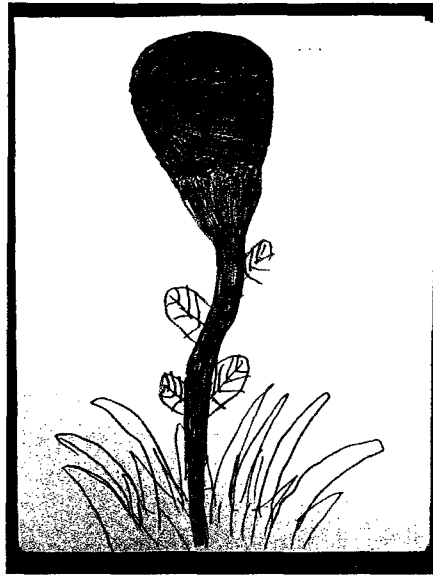


Figure 19. Red rose, marker on white paper.

In retrospect, I feel that this image of beauty and life was a very poignant end to our time together. I now remember back to our second session where Travis could not even fathom making a tree out of the green plasticine (Figure 2) and I feel that this rose was an important symbol of Travis' growth. The rose is often seen as a symbol of "manifestation, rising from the primeval waters to blossom above them" (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 813). Within this understanding, the rose depicted by Travis can be seen as the result of his growth even amid the hardships of his life; his blossoming despite hardships. Indeed, a rose, like any other flower, is not as big or powerful as a tall, sturdy tree, but it is living and a sign of growth. At the bottom of Travis' drawing, one can see that the rose is not yet grounded in the earth but there is potential and its vibrancy is undeniable. I feel that the bright red colour, often seen as a symbol of life, strength, power, youth, love, and passion (Chevalier & Gheerbrant), draws the eyes to its existence

as if it is demanding to be seen. The rose is flourishing despite the lack of a solid, rooted ground; perhaps being held up by the grass around it or by its own strong stem.

As the session ended and Travis packed up the remaining artwork, all that was left was his school logo, which he had always intended to give to the head teacher. I gave Travis a photo I had taken of it for him but I could see his hesitation. I again reminded him of his right to choose and Travis said, "I was thinking that I'd like to keep it" and he rolled the logo picture (Figure 15) up and securely placed it in his bag. With this last strong statement of identity and of self-worth ("I deserve to keep this!"), Travis said, "Bye miss" and we shook hands and parted ways.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

Introduction: Resilient Characteristics

Before I discuss resilient characteristics in light of Travis' therapeutic experience, I feel it is necessary to revisit both Hauser & Allen's (2006) and Camilleri's (2007) lists of characteristics of resilient children and adolescents. I feel that these lists of characteristics can be distilled into two distinctive themes, which can serve as points of focus in this discussion. The first theme encompasses all those aspects that involve the adolescent's self or identity. Within this theme, resilient characteristics include self-esteem, self-concept (which includes self-complexity), self-awareness and the ability to manage difficult emotions, agency, persistence in daily life, and positive future expectations. The second distinctive theme relates to the adolescent's interpersonal skills, or how they relate to other individuals. The resilient characteristics within this theme include a desire to develop relationships and the ability to actively recruit them, good social skills (which includes being more reflective of others' thoughts and feelings), the

ability to see connections between their own actions and others, and problem-solving and conflict resolution skills.

In reviewing Travis' therapeutic experience, I feel that he entered into art therapy with certain key resilient characteristics such as persistence in daily life, certain problem solving skills, and a great desire to develop relationships with other people, although he lacked in the ability to recruit them. In addition, I believe that Travis showed an eagerness to explore his identity, as well as the beginning of an ability to manage the difficult emotions he felt towards his family and his father's death. In the relatively short period of 23 weeks of art therapy, I feel that Travis took some incredibly meaningful steps towards other resilient characteristics previously outlined, such as self-concept and complexity, self-awareness, an increase in appropriate emotional management, social skills, problem-solving, and developing relationships. In the remainder of this discussion I will first focus on Travis' development of a more complex and positive identity. I will then look at Travis' development of a therapeutic relationship with me, his art therapist. Due to the fact that Travis was participating in individual art therapy sessions the only two people occupying this special space was Travis and I. That being said, the developments in interpersonal skills were noted in relation to Travis' therapeutic alliance with me. Finally, I will focus on Travis' artistic expressions as a personal strength, specifically highlighting the resilient characteristics of problem solving and emotional expression in the process.

Travis' Search for Identity

I think that Travis' artwork has showed a progression in his identity, from a Travis that focused on his family to a Travis that made art for himself and for his own

prosperity. In the majority of the first eight sessions, Travis was making artwork as presents for his family. In the third and fifth sessions he made a drawing for his older brother (Figure 4), in the tenth session he made a box to put a Christmas gift in (not pictured), in the eighth session he made an origami bear for his mother, and so on. In these sessions, I feel that Travis could not or would not separate his own identity from that of his role within the family as the “trouble maker” and the source of their problems. Through metaphorically working through these feelings and thoughts (self-reflection), Travis progressed in later sessions (eleven to seventeen) to creating art for his peers, which was more developmentally appropriate for an adolescent. Finally, after our first separation, Travis began to make art for himself, which I believe indicated a process of separating his own identity from that of his family and his peers. From the triumphant twelfth session in which Travis burned his name into a piece of wood (Figure 11), Travis began to explore his own personal identity through his artwork. This development continued as Travis began to create a school logo (Figure 15) designed to act as a memento of himself or as a means of promulgating his contribution to the school. The school logo showed that Travis was thinking of his own sense of self, as well as how his sense of self could be incorporated and remembered by others.

A beautiful aspect of Travis’ identity development was how his burgeoning identity began to permeate his artwork in the form of powerful personal symbols. I will begin with the pencil butterfly (Figure 9) of session nine. I initially viewed this butterfly drawing as Travis’ attempt to find ways of relating to other adolescents through appropriating and adapting their images. However, in retrospect, this drawing of a butterfly can be seen as a much deeper, yet tentative, assertion of his developing identity.

The butterfly enters its cocoon as a caterpillar and emerges as a completely new being. Indeed, an important part of butterfly symbolism is based on its metamorphoses. “Its chrysalis is the egg which contains the potentiality of being and the butterfly which emerges from it is the symbol of resurrection” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 140). Similarly, it is also symbolic of a soul freed and is viewed by contemporary psychoanalysis as a symbol of rebirth (Chevalier & Gheerbrant). In this respect the butterfly drawing could be conceived as a symbol of Travis’ process of metamorphosis, which was occurring before me. I feel that Travis was moving away from his family identity as the “troublemaker” and was trying to figure out who he was with other adolescents. An interesting aspect of this drawing is the fact that Travis did not color his own butterfly, and left it void of all colour. I wonder if this represented how he was still unsure, at this point, what colours, as indications of elements of his own personal and unique identity, could fill this butterfly. Although I feel that the butterfly drawing was a strong statement of identity, there was still an air of hesitation and uncertainty that became much less apparent in following sessions.

I would now like to focus on the image of the dragon, which appeared throughout Travis’ therapeutic experience. I feel that the dragon image, which was reproduced time and again by Travis, holds a particular significance to Travis’ identity. Initially, I had only considered the dragon from its role as the mascot to Travis’ summer camp. I knew, from Travis, that this camp was very important to him and believed that the numerous dragon images were representative of his love for this camp. In retrospect, I feel that I was diminishing the importance of such a prominent symbol. As a symbol, the dragon is a powerful one. In Western ideology the dragon is viewed as a “symbol of the bestial

element which must be defeated with strength and discipline” (Biedermann, 1992, p.103). This is also apparent in the numerous myths, fairytales, and legends in which the hero must demonstrate his bravery and spirit by slaying the dragon. If the hero succeeds in his quest he is granted a treasure. I wonder if the succession of dragon images (Figures 4, 5, 12, and 18) was symbolic of Travis’ quest to defeat the dragon and gain his treasure. Perhaps the dragon, as a primitive creative and a symbol of “diabolical tendencies” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996) represented the negative aspects and drives of Travis that he would like to defeat or overcome. In this respect, his treasure would be his ability to control these tendencies. However, another way of viewing this symbol of identity is through Eastern ideology, in which the dragon is a symbol of “happiness, capable of producing the potion of immortality” (Biedermann, p. 102). It represents the primal essence of procreation, fertility, and activity, and is the emblem of the emperor. Within this view of the dragon, I see the dragon as the treasure to be gained. If we look back at its appearance in his artwork, the dragon was initially associated to artworks created for his brother. Through the course of art therapy, as Travis began to develop his own identity, the dragon imagery became his own. I wonder whether Travis was symbolically trying to control the “bad” aspects of the dragon, while simultaneously integrating the “good”.

Finally, a theme of circles became increasingly prevalent in the final weeks of Travis’ art therapy. The circle is often explained as being a symbol of the self as it “expresses the totality of the psyche in all its aspects, including the relationship between man and the whole of nature” (Jaffé, 1964, p. 240). The circle is a powerful symbol that points to ultimate wholeness. This theme of circles was brought to my attention by my

practicum supervisor who viewed it as an expression of Travis' process of individuation, or becoming himself, and of connecting with something more internal. In essence my final seven weeks with Travis were full of circular forms as he began in session seventeen with the rattle (Figure 14), which was followed by the school logo (Figure 15), the rock/ fossil (Figure 16), and finally the red rose in our final session (Figure 19). I personally find the rose, in particular, to be a powerful symbol of self. Its circular form ties it to representation of self as a "mystic center", as well as a chalice of life and the soul (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996).

Despite these wonderful changes in Travis' identity, I still feel as if he is only in the middle of his journey. There are still many miles to walk and work to be done, specifically in relation to Travis' agency and self-esteem. Essentially, as is evident in Travis' list of time-travel wishes that would have made his life "perfect", Travis still sees himself as the problem in his family's dynamic. I feel that it is quite plain in how Travis unfailingly blamed himself for the problems in his life, that he has internalized the negative judgments of others. These internalized others would most likely include bullies like some of his peers and his brothers who harass Travis and put him down. But, I also suspect that Travis' mother might also play a role as well, as she seemed to have identified Travis as the problem child in the family as the son who needed to change his "bad attitude" so that everyone could get along. In addition, up until the very last moment, when I gently reminded Travis that he deserved to keep his school logo (Figure 15), Travis still needed my help or encouragement to realize he was worthy of good things and of the things he has made with love. In this respect, some of his decisions, such as those relating to his self-esteem or sense of self-worth, were still being made with

the help of others. Perhaps, Travis still needed to know that I approved and accepted his choices, and that I believed he was worthy. However, Travis is still young and will continue to grow and I am optimistic that he will continue to develop his identity and self-esteem.

In looking back on the goals of Travis' therapy, I feel that Travis was successful in achieving the goal of exploring his identity. Through his work in art therapy, Travis was able to begin to separate his identity from that of his family and friends, and was able to symbolically explore symbols that were both powerful and personal. In addition, I would like to refer back to the question that is at the heart of this case study. The developments in identity-related resilient characteristics observed in this case study were made possible through the creative act of making art as Travis used parallel processes (giving concrete form to internal elements of his psyche) and symbolic and metaphorical representation.

Our Therapeutic Relationship

In our therapeutic relationship, I was trying to provide Travis with a corrective emotional experience (Alexander & French, 1946) in hopes of allowing Travis to experience a healthier alternative to relating with other people. An important aspect of this corrective emotional experience was the creation of a psychologically and physically safe space, in which a transitional space or place of in-betweens could emerge (Rogers, 1962; Rubin, 2005; Winnicott, 1971). Within this space, Travis was offered the opportunity to experiment, explore, play, create, and, by extension work through issues and make discoveries about himself. I believe that the sense of safety I provided and the space I created for Travis, can be seen in some of the symbols of containment used by

Travis in his artwork. As previously mentioned, the boat (depicted in Figures 2 and 3) is often symbolic of a container for safety, hope, confidence and transcendence (Olderr, 1986). In addition, there have been connections drawn between a boat and a cradle, as both are “carrier of souls” and symbolic of rebirth (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996). Similarly, the box (depicted in Figures 5 and 17) is often interpreted as a feminine symbol, related to the unconscious and the maternal, as well as a container that “always holds a secret, enclosing and keeping from the world something precious, fragile or awesome” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, p. 116). Therefore, I feel that the box Travis made in session twenty-two to house his artworks was acting a protective, and maternal container for his precious artwork (often elements of his unconscious) that he had created in our safe time together. In addition, I wonder whether these symbolic allusions to a protective and maternal space in which Travis had enough room to explore and work through issues could be linked to the fact that in his own home he was reduced to living in a very small space. Perhaps this can be related to a metaphor in which Travis was being given increasingly less space by his mother, and increasingly more space by me as an ideal mother figure. Referring back to the goals of therapy with Travis, I believe that the goals of creating of a strong therapeutic alliance and the providing a safe and creative space were both successfully achieved.

A key aspect to our therapeutic relationship and Travis’ corrective emotional experience was related to his reactions to our scheduled breaks in therapy. Entering into our first major break at Christmas, Travis gave the mouse (Figure 8) a home and locked him in the art closet with the rest of his artworks. Initially, I saw this as a means of finding a safe and secure place for the mouse to exist, in line with what I believe Travis

was looking for in his own home. However, the mouse can be seen in other lights as well. It was brought to my attention by my research advisor that the mouse may be a representation of me. Just as the mouse silently sat and watched Travis' process, so did I. In fact, when I look back to the placement of the mouse, I remember that the mouse was placed on my side of the table where we worked so that both our set of eyes, the mouse and mine, were on Travis. I was a silent observer, honouring Travis' journey and helping in the way I can, for which I feel Travis felt a gratitude for that translated into the form of a mouse. Indeed, and surprisingly enough, the symbolism of mouse makes similar associations. The mouse, as the "maker of the least sound" (De Vries, 1984, p.330) is associated with silence. In addition, the mouse is often associated with gratitude, as well as with the god of medicine, as they are linked to both diseases and cures. At this moment, when we look at the mouse as a representation of me, the act of locking it up in the art closet takes on a slightly different meaning. In locking me, the mouse, up in the art closet I wonder if Travis was essentially trying to contain me and ensure that I would return, that I would still be there (and still locked in that closet) when he got back from this break. I feel that it demonstrated how he felt that he needed me (or the assurance of my continued presence) in order to be soothed and to feel contained. In this respect, the mouse was a transitional object that was highly linked to me. Within the following weeks, Travis' means of dealing with my absence progressively changed as he developed the ability to self-soothe. At our March break, Travis constructed a colour light laser (Figure 14) that greatly resembled a rattle, an object often used by babies to soothe themselves. I feel that the creation of this colour light laser/rattle marked a step in Travis' ability to self-soothe, as he no longer needed my actual presence or the presence

of a representation of me (the mouse). The colour light laser/rattle, as a transitional object not based on a representation of me, was made by Travis and, I believe, contained more aspects of himself. In our final two sessions together, Travis did not appear to make a transitional object. I feel that perhaps this was because he was allowed to finally take his art home with him. In essence, all of the artwork created in our time together could be taken home and could hold the memory of this safe space and of myself, as the ideal mother. I wonder whether Travis' act of creating a box, a safe container, in our penultimate session (Figure 17) was a means of storing these precious items in a container that was perceived as being both safe and maternal.

In returning to my central research question, I would like to point out how the provision of this non-verbal and creative space for Travis allowed him to safely explore his relationship with another individual. Within the flexibility and structure of the art therapy experience, Travis was encouraged in his development of certain interpersonal skills such as recruiting relationships and social skills. In this respect, I feel as if Travis was achieving our therapeutic goal of exploring his relationship to others.

Creativity and Expression

I found Travis' creativity to be an undeniable part of his personality, and one of his greatest strengths. I personally feel that throughout Travis' art therapy treatment, he increasingly used his creativity as a tool to help him compensate for some of his personal difficulties. As mentioned previously, Travis began to use art as a means of connecting with other adolescents through offering to give them his drawings or help them with their own, as in the butterfly from session nine. Travis also used his creativity to problem solve. Within the freedom and structure of art therapy (Rubin, 2005) Travis could face his

problem with stealing. The freedom of the art therapy sessions allowed Travis to let go as he mimed stealing the origami book or gold-toned chain from me, finding different ways of expressing his desire to take them. However, in keeping the structure of art therapy and not allowing him to fulfill his wish, I was ensuring that his “chaos” did not spill out. I thought that it was remarkably smart of Travis to begin to alter the gold chain he so coveted in session sixteen (Figure 13). He knew that I would not let him steal it, but he also knew that he was allowed to take his artwork home at the end of the treatment. His desire for this object and his desire to remain within the structure I had set, led to problem-solving skills in which Travis decided to make the gold chain into art.

I believe that Travis’ most significant use of creativity was in emotional expression. I will discuss his development of emotional expression in two specific areas: a) his use of *running narrative*; and, b) his use of metaphors and symbols. Firstly, an important development to note is Travis’ use of a *running verbal narrative*. Initially Travis’ *running verbal narrative* consisted mainly of labeling what he was making and who he was making it for, as well as describing his process, highlighting mistakes, good points, and points of interest. In these sessions Travis often would not speak of his family, peers, school, self, or emotions unless gently prompted by myself. I feel that initially his use of *running narrative* served several purposes. Firstly, it was a means of practicing his speech in a safe environment. As mentioned previously, Travis was coded with a language disability, which greatly influenced many aspects of his life, and has made Travis feel frustrated that people do not understand him. In addition, as a boy diagnosed with ADD, this verbal narrative could also have been a means of helping Travis stay focused on his current artistic task. His verbal narrative also allowed him to

keep a constant connection with me because it was a means of ensuring that I was watching him and understood his process. His verbal narrative also ensured that importance was being placed on the artistic process he was engaged in, so that I was witnessing his creation on numerous sensory levels, thus making the connections deeper within me. However, in session eighteen, with the beginning of the school logo (Figure 15), we see a change as Travis begins to speak of deeper topics, such as his frustrations and family troubles, without my prompting. I wonder whether through a process of practicing his speech and adapting to the therapeutic process in his own way, Travis gradually became able and/or willing to broaden his verbal narratives to include deeper aspects of himself. As a result, I feel that Travis attained the therapeutic goal of expressing himself verbally.

The second area of emotional expression included Travis' use of metaphors and symbols in his artwork to express deeper emotions within. I believe that an important aspect of art therapy that facilitated in engaging Travis in the process was its nonverbal nature, which allowed him to communicate with me in his own manner and at his own pace (Emunah, 1990; Riley, 2003). Art therapy allowed Travis to express metaverbally intense feelings and emotions about his difficult family dynamics and the pain of his father's death (Moon, 1998). Similarly, Linesch (1988) and Moon's (2007) assertions that an art therapist needs to interpret within the metaphor so as to avoid committing imagicide and to protect the adolescent's fragile ego, played an important role in my work with Travis, especially in relation to the death of his father. Travis' insistence that he did not remember anything about his father's death seemed to me to be a defense against re-experiencing the pain of this tremendous loss. Therefore, I would take the

opportunities, when they occurred, to offer my empathy and understanding within the metaphor. An example of such an opportunity occurred in the eleventh session (Figure 10) as Travis and I used D.N. Angels to explore feelings of sadness and anger at the death of the light and dark angels. Through visual expressions, another successfully attained therapeutic goal, Travis' was able to express himself on a very deep level. In addition, I believe that Travis' use of symbolic and metaphorical expressions was perhaps the most effective creative tool of art therapy in encouraging the development of resilient characteristics.

Conclusion

I could have sincerely written volumes on the richness and complexities of this one case, however, for the purpose of this case study I chose to focus on the ways in which the creative act of making art within an art therapeutic relationship could encourage the development of resilient characteristics in adolescents from alternative learning environments. This case study focused on the therapeutic experience of Travis, a 15 year-old boy who was experiencing personal and interpersonal difficulties due to an array of difficulties at home and school including bullying, ADD, language disability, an absent mother, destructive brothers, and mourning the death of his father. The importance of encouraging the development of resilient characteristics within adolescents, like Travis, from alternative learning environments lies in its ability to 'shield' and protect these adolescents from the great adversity in their lives so that they may flourish (Hauser & Allen, 2006; Thompson, 2006). I believe that within the relatively short period of 23 weeks, Travis was able to take some meaningful steps towards a more secure personal

identity, separate from that of his family, as well as being able to explore a new and corrective interpersonal relationship with myself, the art therapy intern.

Art therapy, as a therapeutic approach, provided Travis with an environment that was less threatening due to the non-verbal nature of making art, allowed him to explore the power of symbolic and metaphorical expressions, offered the parallel processes, as well as providing him with both flexibility and structure. More importantly, the creative aspect of art therapy provided Travis with a creative space, a place of in-betweens, or a 'framework for freedom', in which he was offered both genuine freedom and order, allowing him to explore, experiment, and grow (Rubin, 2005; Winnicott, 1971). Therefore, this creative space, bolstered by Travis and my therapeutic alliance, and coupled with the previously mentioned core elements of art therapy, provided Travis with the environment and the tools he needed to grow.

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APPENDIX 1
LETTER OF INFORMATION

Art Therapy Student: Samantha Abdallah
Concordia University, 1455 De Maisonneuve Blvd. West,
Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3G 1M8

Supervisor: Irene Gericke

Background information:

One of the ways art therapy interns learn how to be art therapists is to write a final paper fulfilling the criteria for the Master's program in Creative Arts Therapies. Their final paper can include material related to ongoing art therapy sessions and artwork by the clients the art therapy interns have worked with during their practicum. In much research focusing on adolescence, the experiences and creative expressions of adolescents in alternative learning environments have been overlooked. In addition, little has been written about the possible effects of creative expression in the lives of these youth. The purpose of doing this final paper is to help the art therapy interns, as well as other interns and art therapists who read the final paper, to increase their knowledge and skill in providing art therapy services to adolescents in alternative learning environments. The art therapy intern will be collecting data through weekly 45 minute long art therapy sessions with the adolescent. The collected data will include the art therapy intern's clinical notes and photographs of the adolescent's artwork.

Permission:

As a student in the Master's program in The Department of Creative Arts Therapies at Concordia University, I am asking you permission to use material related to ongoing art therapy sessions with your adolescent, which will include my clinical notes of sessions. I am also asking you for permission to photograph the artwork of your adolescent and include selected images in my final paper. A copy of the final paper will be bound and kept in the Concordia University Library, and another in the Department's Resource Room. This paper may also be presented in educational settings or published for educational purposes in the future.

Confidentiality:

Because this information is of a personal nature, it is understood that your confidentiality and the confidentiality of your adolescent will be respected in every way possible. Neither the name of your adolescent, the name of the alternative school where the art therapy was given, nor any other identifying information will appear in the research paper or on your adolescent's artwork.

Advantages and Disadvantages to Your Consent:

To my knowledge, this permission will not cause your adolescent any personal inconveniences or advantages. However, certain persons could find that they may have reactions or feelings that are uncomfortable because of the personal nature of the art therapy explorations. Whether or not you give your consent will have no effect on your

adolescent's involvement in art therapy or any other aspect of your adolescent's treatment. You may consent to all or just some of the requests on the accompanying consent form. As well, you may withdraw your consent any time during the study without undo repercussions. To do this, or if you have any questions about this final paper, you may contact the art therapy student or my supervisor, Irene Gericke.

If at any time you have questions regarding your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact my supervisor, Irene Gericke.

Building: VA-270, Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, H3G 1M8

Phone: 514-848-2424 ext. 7384

Email: igericke@alcor.concordia.ca

**APPENDIX 2
CONSENT FORM**

Consent Form

Authorization for photography and the use of material related to on going art therapy sessions.

I, the undersigned

parent/legal guardian of

authorize Samantha Abdallah to take any:

	YES	NO
• Photographs	_____	_____
• Material related to art therapy sessions	_____	_____

that the therapist deems appropriate, and to utilize and publish them for educational purposes, provided that reasonable precautions be taken to conserve confidentiality.

However, I make the following restriction(s)

 Signature of the Participant

 Date

 Signature of the Participant's Parent/Legal Guardian

 Date