

Interning as an Art Therapist for Children with Emotional Disturbances including Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Chapter 1: Research

Autism Spectrum Disorder can be described as a neurological/mental disorder that includes symptoms like lack of social skills, little to no communication skills, lack of ability to report internal physical and emotional experiences, irritability, tantrums, aggression, self-injury, rigid routines, repetitive behaviors, stereotyped/restricted patterns of interest, sleep abnormalities, sensitivity to sensory stimulation, involving auditory, visual, vestibular, tactile, and oral sensory domains (Gabriels & Hill, 2007).

Using different strategies to alleviate symptoms for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder can vary, but according to Mayer, Lochman, Gresham, and Van Acker, in their book called *Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions for Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, chapter 12 takes a deeper look at the most common, top four impairments of higher functioning children and adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The four impairments are, first, Cognitive, for instance, a failure to seeing the big picture, inflexible thinking, and difficulties understanding other people's perspectives. Second, Social Skills, for example, impairments in initiating and sustaining social interactions, attending to and interpreting social cues, and understanding social norms and rules. Third, Anxiety Symptoms, for example, impairments in rituals and routines, obsessive and repetitive thoughts and behaviors, irrational thoughts and fears, and social anxiety. Fourth and lastly, Depressive Symptoms, like understanding the reasons why he or she feels sad and upset, which could translate to the child anger toward their parents or peers. This book specifically looks at cognitive-behavioral interventions to address these needs and in the same respect says that more research is needed in order to measure effectiveness (Mayer, Van Acker, Lochman, & Gresham, 2009).

Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified is a lot like Autism Spectrum Disorder because it can be measured on the same spectrum as Autism and Asperger's Syndrome (Mayer, Van Acker, Lochman, & Gresham, 2009). Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified includes severe and pervasive impairments in social interactions but without all criteria for autism (Barlow, 2009). Individuals may not display the early avoidance of social interaction but still may exhibit significant social problems. Their problems may become more obvious at age 3. Symptoms of classic Autism, Autism Spectrum Disorder are according to the DSM-IV diagnostic criteria is

A. A total of six or more items from (1), (2), and (3), with at least two from (1) and one from each (2) and (3):

1. Qualitative impairment in social interaction, as manifested by at least two of the following:
 - a. Marked impairment in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body postures, and gestures to regulate social interactions
 - b. Failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level
 - c. A lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people (e.g., by a lack of showing, bringing, or pointing out objects of interest)
 - d. Lack of social or emotional reciprocity
2. Qualitative impairments in communication as manifested by at least one of the following:
 - a. Delay in, or total lack of, the development of spoken language (not accompanied by an attempt to compensate through alternative modes of communication such as gesture or mime)
 - b. In individuals with adequate speech, marked impairment in the ability to initiate or sustain a conversation with others

- c. Stereotyped and repetitive use of language or idiosyncratic language
 - d. Lack of varied, spontaneous make-believe play or socialimitative play appropriate to developmental level
3. Restricted repetitive and stereotyped pattern of behavior, interests, and activities, as manifested by at least one of the following:
- a. Encompassing preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal in either intensity or focus
 - b. Apparently inflexible adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals
 - c. Stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms (e.g., hand or finger flapping or twisting, or complex whole-body movements)
 - d. Persistent preoccupation with parts of objects
- B. Delays or abnormal functioning in at least one of the following areas, with onset prior to age 3 years: (1) social interaction, (2) language as used in social communication, or (3) symbolic or imaginative play.
- C. The disturbance is not better accounted for by Rett's disorder or childhood disintegrative disorder (Barlow & Durand, 2009).

The client I have been interning with, Kayla, which I will discuss more about in chapter 2, has been diagnosed with PDD-NOS, Autism Spectrum Disorder and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, with poor insight, which according to the DSM-IV diagnostic criteria one must have:

A. Either obsessions or compulsions

Obsessions are defined by 1- 4:

- 1. Recurrent and persistent thoughts, impulses, or images that are experienced, at some time during the disturbance, as intrusive and inappropriate and cause marked anxiety or distress

2. The thoughts, impulses or images are not simply excessive worries about real life problems
3. The person attempts to ignore or suppress such thoughts, impulses, or images, or to neutralize them with some other action
4. The person recognizes that the obsessional thoughts, impulses, or images are a product of his or her own mind (not imposed from without as in thought insertion)

Compulsions as defined by 1 and 2:

1. Repetitive behaviors (e.g., handwashing, ordering, checking) or mental acts (e.g., praying, counting, repeating words silently) that the person feels driven to perform in response to an obsession, or according to rules that must be applied rigidly
2. The behaviors or mental acts are aimed at preventing or reducing distress or preventing some dreaded event or situation; however, these behaviors or mental acts either are not connected in realistic way with what are designed to neutralize or prevent or are clearly excessive

B. This information does not apply to children.

C. The obsessions or compulsions cause marked distress, are time consuming (take more than 1 hour a day), or significantly interfere with the person's normal routine, occupational (or academic) functioning, or usual social activities or relationships.

D. If another Axis 1 disorder is present, the content of the obsessions or compulsions is not restricted to it (e.g., preoccupation with food in the presence of an eating disorder; hair pulling in the presence of trichotillomania; concern with appearance in the presence of body dysmorphic disorder; preoccupation with drugs in the presence of a substance use disorder; preoccupation with having a serious illness in the presence of hypochondriasis; preoccupation with sexual

urges or fantasies in the presence of a paraphilia; or ruminations in the presence of major depressive disorder).

E. The disturbance is not due to the direct effects of a substance (e.g., drugs of abuse, medication) or a general medical condition.

Specify if:

With poor insight: If, for most of the time during the current episode, the person does not recognize that the obsessions and compulsions are excessive or unreasonable (Barlow & Durand, 2009).

The film *Loving Lampposts*, written and directed by Todd Drezner, answers two questions about Autism. These questions are: Is autism a devastating sickness to be cured? Or is it a variation of the human brain, just a different way to be a human? These questions are answered by parents of children and adults with autism, ASD and PDD-NOS, experts in the medical and psychological fields and adults with autism. On one hand there are those who treat autism as a disorder, because it's in the DSM-IV as a mental disorder that can be manipulated and changed and cured through therapy. On another hand, those in the medical field treat autism as a medical problem that can be cured through a clean diet, vitamin supplements, and therefore the autistic symptoms subside. Others like to play the blame game and say autism is caused by vaccinations, mercury poisoning, genetics, etc, and they blame themselves for exposing their children to these toxins and then buy into the gimmicks on certain products that can clear the toxins from your child's body and rid them of autism (Drezner, 2010).

A child with autism is still a child who needs love and affection, to be treated as an individual, even though their personality is unlike most. Several parents of children with autism have said that those who accept their child's autism are just lazy, in denial, or are being passive

about autism, when really as several moms and dads testimony to their acceptance, has been much more fulfilling to be active with their children rather than being caught up in finding a cure (Drezner, 2010).

The conclusion to this film was that it is more important to all the people who were interviewed, rather than acceptance or finding a cure, is to have a meaningful relationship with your child who has autism than anything else (Drezner, 2010).

Another film on autism, called *George*, filmed in a very different way, includes a real family with a 12 year old child named George who has autism. HBO asked Henry Corra, one of their filmmakers, if he would make this documentary about his autistic son and so he gave it a shot. Henry gave his son George a camera and taught him about film making along the way as he filmed the world through his eyes. Interviews were done on teachers, family friends, school-age friends, strangers on the street as they walked past, and others with autism, children and adults, alike. There are some interesting scenes that show the emotional overload that George experiences when the rituals of sameness or when expected events in his life aren't followed through with and its very interesting to see it in context.

Half way through filming, HBO decided to end its contract with the Corras because with the footage HBO viewed, they said George wasn't "autistic enough," so Henry Corra finished the film by himself over the rest of the year 1995 out of his own pocket.

There were several other life events that the film touches on, for instance, when George starts to like girls and go through puberty. Also, a very touching moment when Henry has a conversation with George about how he and his mother are separating and then they eventually divorce and live in different locations. Eventually in 2000, HBO decided to show the film, but all rights belong to Henry Corra (Corra, 1995).

The use of art therapy as an intervention in the Handbook of Art Therapy, (Malchiodi, 2003) chapter 15 discusses the use of art therapy with children who have autism, and how important early interventions are with these children.

“The role of art therapy (e.g., helping clients with self-expression and self-understanding through the use of symbolic imagery) is somewhat different with children who have autism. Young children with autism tend to lack the basic skills required in the areas of attention, play, communication, cognition, imitation, generalization, and motor coordination to understand and engage in the world. Therefore, art therapy needs to be adapted to the strengths and needs of the children (Malchiodi, 2003).”

According to the book *The Use of Creative Therapies with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, by Stephanie L. Brooke, chapter two describes, because individuals with autism typically process information differently, the use of creative interventions, activities and therapies are a very important component to effective treatment. Brooke says “Art serves as an evolutionary process for children as they develop from one stage to the next.... artistic expression reflects a child's object constancy, growth, and development in addition to expressing the ordering of their internal and external world. Through creative visual expression, an art therapist can assess a child's relationship and the emotional significance attached to important objects (Brooke, 2009).”

Brooke continues that the involvement in creative visual activities allows for stimulation on both multidimensional and multisensory levels and that the use of visuals in therapeutic sessions can help those with AS, or Asperger's Syndrome, and similar diagnoses on the Spectrum, to gain insight into perspectives in social situations and when art and art therapy is coupled with a Cognitive- Behavioral approach, the artwork “can be used to help the AS client connect with their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions to situational triggers... with the goal in mind

to increase autonomy, spontaneity and confidence.”

Here is just one example Brooke explains art therapy with an adolescent with AS can be completely successful. Brooke explains in chapter two that she has researched that an Art Therapist who worked with a client, Steven, over a long period of time and was able to see definite changes from working with him and in his progression, for instance in the beginning, not being able to socialize appropriately and having to miss school or leave early due to his anxiety levels, and results from a series of tests and assessments determined that he could be diagnosed in the PDD classification, or Pervasive Developmental Disorders. Steven's diagnosis changed to Asperger's Syndrome after time and review.

Brooke describes two similar activities that are administered both at the very beginning of and near the end of treatment. It is a good thing to repeat activities like this to measure progress when treating anyone with any disorder and to measure growth and effectiveness. The first activity was to use cut or torn pictures from the magazines and create a collage that represents who the client is, in this case it is Steven, a 16-year-old male. Steven was also asked to use descriptive words to “further express his self-identity.” The words that he wrote were “cheery, loveable, kind and fun.” And the images he chose were of a lion, two horses, a car, a computer, and an airplane. His collage did not include any human figures.

The activity that was done much later in treatment was to make an “expression collage.” She first asked her client, Steven, to write a list of facial expressions. He came up with “happy,” “sad,” “mad,” “shy,” “excited,” and “listening.” Then the client was given magazines, scissors, glue and asked to find pictures that represented each of the expressions listed. The words he came up with were written on a 12” x14” white piece of paper. The client was able to cut out several pictures that represented each expression and glued them on the paper. To process, when

the client was finished with the artwork, Brooke asked several questions like: “When might someone make that expression? Give an example of a time when you observed someone using that expression? Have you ever used that expression?” Steven was able to answer quickly and discuss each expression, but was only able to give minimal account for each expression relating to his own personal experiences (Brooke, 2009).

As indicated with the first directive, Steven had difficulty relating and connecting the activity to himself, but as treatment went on, Steven was able to understand the directives and was able to understand himself better. For Steven's last session, the art therapist used the same directive as the first: to make a collage that expresses your identity: using magazine pictures to create a collage that represents Steven. The art therapist writes,

“This time he used mostly active people who were participating in sports and playing music. He also included a small plant, shrimp, a dog and a car. When he finished, Steven discussed how the collage represented himself. He stated that he enjoyed being active outdoors and in the water. He continued to discuss how much he enjoys watching baseball and playing guitar. Further, he said that he wants to get an SUV when he gets his license and shrimp is his favorite food... Steven was able to state that he was ready to move forward in his life and enjoy new challenges. He also spoke about being more connected with people and enjoying new experiences (Brooke, 2009).”

Chapter 2: Kayla and Art Therapy

Chapter two will discuss my own experience with Kayla, who I have worked with as an Art Therapy intern. I have witnessed changes and developments in social relatedness and emotional impairments through cognitive-behavioral approaches and the use of art activities both in directive and non-directive approaches. I have worked with Kayla, age 6, as a Mental Health Practitioner since July 2011 at Heartland Kids, a Children's Therapeutic Services and Supports, or CTSS, organization. Heartland Kids provides services for children who have severe emotional disturbances in their own environment, which includes in home and at school. Kayla attends kindergarten at an inner city public school in Duluth where she has been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder in her Individual Education Plan. At Heartland Kids she has been diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. The reason for the different diagnoses at different locations, Kayla's school and Heartland Kids, is because there are a separate set of diagnostic assessments that each have to accommodate. Heartland Kids is very thorough in their Diagnostic Assessments which has the advantage of diagnosing a specific disorder, whereas the public school has no power to diagnose, but because PDD-NOS is under the umbrella of Autism Spectrum Disorders, they have thus given her the broader label for school and educational purposes.

Diagnosis and Communication Skills

Kayla presents on the high functioning side of the Autism spectrum and without behavior issues, but in the area of social relatedness, communication and emotional management, she is diagnosed as autistic. She has difficulty initiating social interactions due to her inability to

communicate verbally in social situations because she is so rigid. She exhibits much anxiety when trying to engage in social situations, to the point where she would not engage with her peers at school. She avoids play because if something happens she dislikes, she gets emotionally confused and frustrated.

On the playground, Kayla engages in limited social interactions but seems she to choose non-threatening play like going down the slide over and over, or swinging. Encouraging her to engage her peers in play has rarely been successful. When she has asked peers to play a game or fantasy play she either gets rejected by her peers, or she plays only a few minutes and engages in a less social activity. Kayla becomes easily frustrated when peers change rules of the games suddenly.

Kayla relies heavily on the help she gets from adults in the classroom and at home, rather than looking to her peers for help. For example, if during an art activity, if she needs the glue, she would ask an adult to get it rather than ask a peer. Kayla tends to look to an adult to help her zip her jacket rather than ask one of her peers.

Kayla has had access to a personal care assistant, or PCA, at home since she was an infant, but last year, that service was discontinued. These services, however, were maintained for her deaf twin sister. Kayla has difficulty communicating with her sister, who seems easy going and not as rigid as Kayla. The two sister's interactions have seemed to improve as they both learn more sign language, and Abby, Kayla's twin sister, will get better at lip reading. While playing, Kayla attempts to takes full control while they play and becomes upset sometimes even when other ideas are suggested. Kayla's attitude is "I want to do what I decide to do."

Rigid Behavior

Kayla's routines are incredibly important due to her extreme rigidity. Kayla exhibits rigid

behavior in nearly all areas of her life. If Kayla wants to play a game like Memory, and her sister wants to play Barbies instead, an argument often ensues. Adult mediation is needed to help them make a compromise. Kayla will have an emotional outburst where she gets upset and yells at her sister. In extreme instances, when she doesn't get what she wants she will exhibit dangerous behavior such as self-harm and injury. She will say, "If I don't get my way, I'm going to bite myself until I bleed," or "I'm going to scratch myself til I bleed," or she will hit herself in the head. This behavior is usually stopped by taking her hand and asking her to calm down.

Eventually Mother will show affection and make sure she's not going to hit herself anymore. If her behavior persists, i.e.: crying, yelling and self-harming, she is asked to take a break in her room. This is not a "time out" kind of break as if she were being punished. Kayla's parent's have used "taking a break" as a calming tool. Kayla has several coping strategies in her room that include reading a book, playing, taking deep breaths, thinking about pleasant things, singing, etc...This list of coping strategies are posted on her closet door for a reminder when she takes a break. When Kayla is calm she can either stay in her room and play, or she can return to whatever situation was bothering her and somehow solve the problem.

Another example of Kayla's rigid behavior manifests around food. Kayla recently became sensitive to gluten and has now maintained a gluten free diet. Even before going gluten free, Kayla was very specific about what she ate and how it was cooked and how it was served. She doesn't eat meat other than bologna, and one type of lunch meat, honey ham, however, she loves cheese. If Kayla had a choice, she would eat only cheese. She doesn't eat vegetables, and fruits are limited to mandarin oranges, peaches, dehydrated peaches, and apple slices with the skin peeled off. Kayla also eats noodles, but with only cheese on them. She also has a label specific obsession, so when the label on milk changed, she no longer drank milk. Same with bottled juice,

when the label changes, she doesn't drink it anymore. The only two things that are consistent are cheese and chocolate, everything else is optional to Kayla.

Kayla's parents and I have tried using a reward system, praise, and encouragement as a means of teaching Kayla healthy living skills during meals. Kayla was able to understand what a reward was to her and what an example of a good reward would be, for instance, a toy or a piece of chocolate. The reward system was too overwhelming and emotional. The reward seemed to be not worth the effort for Kayla. Kayla gets upset frequently over dinner, which for Kayla is bologna, a slice of cheese and noodles of some kind with cheese on them. When Kayla has difficulty accepting this as her dinner she is allowed to trade foods, but only with a fruit or a vegetable or some kind of meat. This ends up being a battle of "I don't want any of those things" which could potentially turn into an emotional outburst because she doesn't get her way. Kayla also seems to have a slight contamination fear. If her cheese were to touch the bologna, both items would be considered contaminated and then she wouldn't eat any of her dinner and the emotional outburst would turn into a full blown meltdown.

When I first started working with Kayla, her meltdowns lasted about an hour. This consisted of yelling, shouting, and when that wouldn't get her anywhere she would shout threats, such as "If you don't put a piece of cheese on my plate, I am going to kick you!" or "I am going to scratch myself until I bleed if you don't do what I want!" Ultimately she could coax her Mother into giving her some small compromise, for example, if she ate some of what was already on her plate, then she could get another piece of cheese. Gradually, Mother and I have scaled back on giving into threats and has resulted in Kayla getting upset and self-harm, but never to the point of where she bleeds. Every time she behaves this way we explain that "scratching yourself, or hitting your head won't make us get up, walk to the fridge, get out a

piece of cheese and put it on your plate... it just doesn't work like that,” this is where we use humor and laughter as a tool to help Kayla visualize reality and understanding which she responds to well. If Kayla continues this behavior after we explain this, she will be given a choice to continue to eat or to take a break in her room. As time has gone on, the breaks became fewer and shorter. At times the breaks would last twenty minutes and I would check on her half way through the break and find her still screaming and throwing things, but most often she would have settled down and started playing with her toys.

Kayla's behavior issues have changed quite a bit over time. Kayla still gets upset over food and probably will for a long time, but instead of getting so worked up and exploding with emotions over not getting her way, she will ask for something else and when Mother says no, Mother adds that they can make a “deal” and have an item she wants another night. If this creates an emotional outburst, we explain that getting upset won't make us give Kayla the things she wants, and that the reality is: she can't always choose what she gets to have for dinner and Mother knows what is good and healthy for her. If Kayla is still upset she can use some of the tools mentioned earlier to calm down like deep breathing, thinking of pleasant things, etc.. Over the last two months, Kayla has only needed to take a break over an upset because of dinner three times. This is seen as great success! For Kayla to reduce the meltdowns and self-harm over dinner by at least half has been the goal for a full year and we made it happen in nine months.

Boundaries and Obsessions

When I first met Kayla, she hopped in my lap and gave me a hug and a kiss. As a Mental Health Practitioner, none of these things are appropriate so I have had to come up with ways to explain how its not OK to hug and kiss a stranger. I also explained that I was “allergic” to kisses. That took kissing off the table completely. Kayla has a hard time knowing who is appropriate to

hug and who is not. Kayla's Mother told me right away that one day in the summer, Kayla went up to the mail man and gave him a hug because he brought the mail. This is very inappropriate for a girl her age because of "stranger danger." We decided to make a hug list with Kayla to name all the people that mom deems appropriate to hug. Agreed persons for physical affection include all family, Kayla's pastor, two close family friends and "helpers" like personal care attendants and Mental Health Practitioners.

Kayla started asking if she could hug her Kindergarten teacher, the lunch lady, the gym teacher and the helpers at school, we explained, "If you don't know their first name, if they don't visit you at your house, if they don't know your name, that means that they are a stranger, even if you see them every day, and they are not to be hugged." I get to work with Kayla at school for an hour every Tuesday and Thursday and one day she completely forgot about the hug list. We were walking out to the playground and Kayla got out of line and went up to the gym teacher and hugged him. I told her, "he isn't on your hug list so you should not be hugging him." Kayla's response was that she forgot and she apologized. Its rather confusing for Kayla to understand why she can't hug everyone. Its been quite a challenge to get Kayla to understand and continue to understand who strangers are. We have read books together and had discussions about who strangers are and when she asks questions, she seems to understand who a stranger is and what a stranger looks like, but in Kayla's understanding, many people qualify as those she can hug, such as a person who is walking by that is wearing the same color shirt as her, or if they have the same hair color as her, or if they like the same Disney Princess- these are the things that make people qualified for physical affection on the hug list in Kayla's mind.

Kayla is also diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or OCD. Her obsessions often carry over to her autistic behaviors too, for instance her obsession with Disney Princesses

and being a princess. In Autism Spectrum Disorder, stereotyped interests in an inappropriate intensity or focus is one of the criteria for diagnosis. This sounds very much like OCD, but because she is obsessed and compulsives over many things like Disney Princesses, food and labels



makes this diagnosis appropriate.

Snow White



All of the Disney Princesses

Introducing Art Therapy

Kayla already enjoys doing art, but with her diagnoses nearly anything can become a trigger for an emotional outburst. In the beginning, art made Kayla upset. Nearly everything we tried, whether it be a simple drawing of herself or a nonspecific person, Kayla would make it very complicated and when something went wrong, she would give up, get emotional about it and want to tear it up and throw it away. She never actually tore it up, but she would crumple it up and toss it into the trash or on the floor. When she would do this, her Mother would usually go get the picture with a mistake on it and flatten it again and ask what makes the picture wrong and offer a simple solution to make the mistake into something. Kayla would always get more emotional and this could potentially turn into a meltdown. I didn't want art to be a traumatic experience for Kayla, but that was the way it initially looked. I had to shift my approach with

Kayla to encourage her to create art that involved abstract shapes, lines and colors, nonspecific material, or use collage ideas so that drawing wasn't so daunting. My conclusion was that this was still not as successful, but over time, things have become easier for Kayla and less complicated. Through ten months of working with Kayla, she has warmed to the ideas of drawing, scribbling, making collages, using paint, realistically and abstract, print making with different materials such as food, fruits and vegetables, stamps, and other textured objects, and making play-doe sculptures or things out of play-doe molds, with seldom emotional outbursts.

During a session where Kayla was drawing a self portrait and she didn't like how the shirt turned out, Kayla became so upset, she cried and said "I want to tear this picture up and throw it away!" and normally I'd ask her to show me the mistake before she crumpled the paper up, but this particular time I simply said "go ahead," and Kayla looked at me with amazement without crying. I gave her permission to do what she has been threatening all along, but has never actually done. I reiterated the statement, just to make sure she understood me. When she started ripping, it was the most liberating thing to watch. I gave her permission to give into aggressive action toward her mistake that she had never been able to do before. Since this happened, Kayla has become less frustrated and emotional over mistakes and has been more expressive and accepting of new and different sensory art materials.

Collage of Favorite Things

In another session, I asked Kayla if she'd like to make a collage of her favorite things. We used old flashcards to cut up. Kayla used images of toys, animals, outdoor activities like tennis, a slide and flowers, food like pizza and candy. After becoming upset several times because her glue ran out, and needing to take a break to calm down, this is her final product.



Halloween and Thanksgiving

In another session near Halloween, Kayla wanted to draw a skeleton on black paper with white crayon. The drawing became too difficult to execute so she tried to destroy it. I told her that it was okay that she was having trouble because skeletons were very intricate and detailed.



Skeleton



Turkey Day Drawing



Alice and the White Rabbit

I redirected Kayla to color in a turkey for Thanksgiving for a Cub Foods food drive. This seemed to get her mind off of skeletons and Halloween for a moment. When it was finished, Kayla drew on white paper Alice, from Alice in Wonderland and the White Rabbit. She used her stuffed animals as models and set them in front of her so she could get the likeness correct. She continued working on other little things during the rest of this session, but I never pushed Kayla into trying to draw a skeleton again because it would have upset her. This is where my judgment comes in with Kayla, I know when things could potentially become emotional outbursts. Even though the “try and try again” mentality may work for some, this would have been quite

disastrous for Kayla and it would have concluded with an unnecessary amount of emotions that Kayla has difficulty handling.

Kayla has shown improvement in her coordination skills in motor functioning by doing tasks and activities that include cutting, gluing, drawing and painting. Even though Kayla can become upset by any and all of these activities, she continues to practice these skills in order to master them. When she masters these things, her sense of accomplishment and pride will potentially override any upset she learned to work through.

Art therapy also builds cognitive skills (Malchiodi, 2008). Even though Kayla is on the bright side already, building these skills will continue to sharpen her mind. Concepts such as primary and secondary colors, patterns, matching, labeling are all necessary to strengthen cognitive skills. Kayla is able to distinguish between primary and secondary colors and mix them accordingly. Kayla is able to make patterns with letters, numbers, shapes and other symbols in school and sometimes they show up in her artwork because she understands them as patterned images rather than separate symbols.

Girl Scouts

Kayla is capable of using her words to meet her needs, but potentially becomes problematic during art making. Sometimes emotions just take over. Kayla is in Girl Scouts and on occasion there is an art activity during meetings. Kayla enjoys doing art at Girl Scouts most of the time, but when something goes wrong Kayla becomes emotional and sometimes inconsolable, for example, there was an activity recently that Kayla got particularly upset by. The Girl Scout lesson was about being considerate and caring toward others, she needed to draw her head and trace a hands on each side of her head and think of several ways to be considerate. Kayla tried, but became emotional. She was able to tell me what she was upset over. After taking a break, we

tried again together. Kayla was able to come back to the project, draw her head and facial features with ease and thought of one way to be considerate. When the project was finished, Kayla was unable to maintain her calm when she rejoined the group. The social part of the Girl Scouts seems overstimulating for her and she gets upset easily. Several times, Kayla has told me that she wants to quit Girl Scouts because its “too hard.” My interpretation is that Girl Scouts is overstimulating especially when the meetings are at the end of a long school day.

When we are at Kayla's home and doing art, we are able to practice in a much calmer social skill building environment and until we perfect some of the skills she needs to use in school and Girl Scouts, being social without emotional outbursts will be difficult. At home Kayla is able to share art supplies with ease and is always fair and equal with her sister. In this setting, Kayla asks nicely for materials and is not upset by the small stuff, she has, over time, become calmer to the idea of sharing her belongings, such as pencils that have her favorite princesses on them. When we first started, if anyone touched her belongings, such as the pencil with her favorite princesses on it, she would rip it out of their hands and shout “THAT'S MINE!” and then go back to what she was doing. At times Kayla can still get possessive over seemingly insignificant things, but it is rare. Kayla is able to work well in smaller social scale settings and has less and less emotional outbursts at home.

Success

A non-direct approach includes no specific plan or directive, it allows for more freedom for the client to use their own level of self-expression with materials provided and when the art making is finished, questions are asked about the piece, for instance: If you could give this piece a title what would it be? Etc... When I use a non-direct approach for art therapy with Kayla, it seems to have the most therapeutic affect. At the beginning of a session, I will simply suggest

that we make art, whether that be drawing with crayons, markers or colored pencils, or using Play-Doe, or some other tactile media. Sometimes Kayla says she doesn't feel like making art, but as soon as the supplies come out, Kayla will do at least a small activity, like a drawing. On one recent occasion, I asked Kayla what she'd like to do for the session and asked if she would make something that I could show my Practicum class and I explained what that meant and how she is helping me get a good grade by doing art with me. I explained too, that the other interns in my class have clients just like her and they share their clients artwork as well. Kayla worked excitedly with construction paper and colored pencils. Several times she asked for my help. She made a mistake with one of the lines she was eventually going to cut and I told her "its okay, those are just guidelines," and I thought this would upset her, but she kept working. She got out her scissors and started cutting, she even cut the error line, but looked up at me and said "Its okay, it doesn't have to be perfect." She continued to work until there were several sheets of cut paper and used gift wrap ribbon too. She announced that it was a kite and that she made the tail extra long so that adults can fly it. For Kayla, this was just a simple activity, but it spoke volumes for the work that I have been doing with her on how in art, there are no mistakes and that mistakes can always be guidelines, or lessons for the next time you do the activity. When Kayla said "Its okay, it doesn't have to be perfect," about a mistake, I was almost in tears because she understood that its not something to get upset over, like she would have earlier in our practice, but she kept working. It was just a small mistake that didn't matter in the grand scheme of making the kite. This is leaps and bounds from where we were when we started doing art. I can definitely see that Kayla can enjoy doing art now, much improved than when she was hung up on getting upset over the littlest mistakes and crumpling her work up and getting so frustrated that it took nearly an hour to calm down. She has come a long way and I hope she continues to do so, but I understand

that we all have days where things don't always go right and that Kayla will not magically be cured of her behavioral and emotional outbursts. Helping her see and use the tools it takes to be emotional when appropriate, she will be able to do anything she sets out to do.

Kayla has a very strong support system and if she continues to have success through services that Heartland Kids provides, whether other practitioners or myself, Kayla will get even more acquainted with the social skills, communication skills, self-expression tools, and emotional management skills that it takes for her to survive daily life. I am not saying she will never have a meltdown again, but it is likely that the meltdowns will become fewer and far between, and reduction is great success.

Chapter 3:

Coping as an Art Therapy Intern

For the last two years, being an Art Therapy Intern has been the most interesting, fun and yet challenging times in my life thus far. There are several things that I do in order to keep my head on straight and to de-stress when I feel I've overloaded myself with school as a Masters student and my work as a Mental Health Practitioner. Managing what I call "Me Time," has been the best thing I've done in my collective college years. "Me Time," consists of a combination of yoga, meditation, and making art in various forms.

Yoga

Yoga is known for its stress-reducing qualities. When I first tried yoga, it was for exercise only. I thought that this would be an easy way to get my 30 minutes of exercise every day, but after a week or two of the slow paced poses that then seemed easy and relaxing, I tried a class on campus called Power Yoga. Not only was it excellent exercise, it was challenging enough for me to think about nothing else in life but what I was doing in the class. In some ways that class was an escape and in some ways it helped me realize how important reality is. Yoga, I have found, has many benefits for body and mind. I try to practice different poses at least three times a week, given my schedule and its changes, which is great for exercise, flexibility and strength. The yoga I enjoy doing involves several different poses in a specific order and then doing that order at least five times using deep breathing and focus to center my mind.

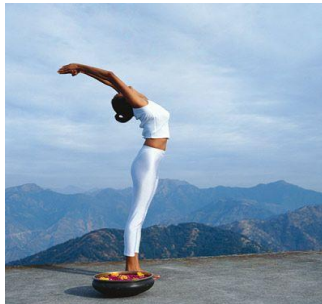
The health benefits of yoga have been more than evident for my overall health. Yoga has helped reduce my stress and anxiety, lowered my blood pressure, lose some weight, relieved depression symptoms, boosts my mood, and has also helped me sleep better. I have also found

that I am a lot stronger now than I was before I started practicing yoga, stronger in muscle tone and flexibility and also in focus and concentration. Instead of collapsing at the end of stressful day I can do two or three yoga poses, like downward facing dog, mountain pose, and then a



cobra pose, before bed and feel calm, collected and ready.

Downward facing dog pose



Mountain pose



Cobra pose

Its rather interesting that I started out thinking that yoga would be just some simple stretching exercises, but has turned into a philosophy and a way of life. I can't wait to do yoga when I get home from work and if I'm already too exhausted and its too late to do an entire work out, just three poses can help me relax and become calm after a stressful day. On the mornings I do yoga I feel rejuvenated and energized afterward. I'm very happy I found yoga and am still making time for it in my day to day life because it has become a part of my personality. At the end of each yoga session a common practice is placing your hands together at your heart chakra and saying, "namaste," which means "bow me you" or "the spirit in me respects the spirit in you." This has been a sort of homework for me because when I find myself judging others I remind myself to practice this bit of yoga with those who challenge me. In my head, I remind myself that I must respect everyone and I say namaste silently to try to overcome judgments and challenging people. It has been an excellent practice so far, even though there are limitations to every practice.

Meditation

I have a strange and beautiful connection with meditation. One night as an undergrad in the Fall of 2009, I woke in the middle of a dead sleep because I was dreaming about writing a meditation. My conscious mind pulled me from my slumber and I wrote the things in my dream down. I added the meditation to a group project for one of my art therapy classes, Art Therapy Techniques. The project was to pick two rocks and make one that symbolizes your negative attributes and the other your positive one. Here is my meditation:

“We want you to close your eyes
Make yourself feel comfortable
If you are uncomfortable please change your position
If you are still uncomfortable, know that we accept you
We want you to trust us as we lead you in this art assessment
This is a safe place where your thoughts and feelings have great value
This is a place that you and your art are not subject to judgment
We ask you to consider the thoughts and feelings of others around you and try not to harbor any negative judgments against them or their art work
With that in mind, we would like you to think about your own personal experiences, events, relationships or things that cause you to think negatively
Things that you consider a burden or a weakness
Now, if you can, broaden those thoughts
What's really bothering you? (Pause) What weighs you down? (Pause)
Why is it bothering you? (Pause) How do you deal with it? (Pause)
Remember, your thoughts and feelings are accepted in this place
And we do not judge you
We also would like you to think about the things in your life that help you stay strong
Your solid, unshakable foundation, Your rock
What is it that keeps you going? (Pause)
How does this positive force aid in your strength? (Pause)
Does it make you happy? Why?
Remember, you are in a safe, trusting place where your thoughts and feelings have great worth
Now, we want you to visualize both something that you consider a burden and another something that keeps you strong
Visualize the two juxtaposed in your mind
What do they look like? (Pause)
Which is heavier? (Pause)
Can you imagine and explore them with your other senses...
What do they sound like when you hear them?
What do they taste like? What do they smell like?
What do they feel like when you touch them?
Please remember these things
And also remember that we do not judge you or your thoughts and feelings
We realize that some of these things are difficult to think about and may be sensitive areas
We will try to be sensitive to your needs, thoughts and feelings
We will not harbor any negative judgments towards you because of these difficulties
We accept you, Its OK to feel, We are only human, You may open your eyes.”

The next meditation I wrote was for my first semester in my Masters education in Ecopsychology and Meditation class in the Fall of 2010. This was also written for a group project on Chakra work and making pendulums out of healing stones. It goes like this:

“Get yourself in a comfortable position, whether it be standing, sitting or lying down.
 Next, focus on your breath. Help it become rhythmic. Whether it take five beats per breath or ten, do what is comfortable for you and your lung capacity.
 Now let yourself become relaxed as you breathe in and out.
 Become aware of how your body feels when you breathe in rhythm.
 How precious is this, to breathe.
 Let your body become more relaxed as you clear your mind and focus on your breath.
 Let your breath wash away all the stuff that is keeping you from relaxing.
 Relax your forehead, Relax your eyes, Relax your neck, Relax your chest, your heart
 Relax your core, your insides, Relax yourself down to your toes
 Feel your body balancing itself as you relax deeper
 If your mind wanders redirect back to your breathing
 Think now on your being
 Though we, ourselves, are sole beings, Alone
 We are alone, together, here and now,
 Here we are breathing and staying open to possibilities and energies that flow through each and every one of us
 Alone we have this energy, Together we have this energy
 Think now on this earth we call home
 In everyday life, we are the center of the universe
 In everyday life, we care about the things that effect us
 In everyday life, we stay in our comfort zones
 But where could you be if you stepped out of the tiny box we put ourselves in?
 Where would you be if you called another part of the world home?
 Where would you be if life and the earth weren't so complex?
 Where would you be if you knew you wouldn't get your heart broken?
 What would you be doing? What would you see? Who would you be with?
 What would you hear? What would you smell? What would you be feeling?
 Lets all take a moment and ponder these things and listen to your energy and your soul
 Listen to you and the infinite earth.
 When you are ready, you can slowly come back and open your eyes.”

The next semester, Spring of 2011, my second semester in Grad school, I wrote a meditation for my Multi Modal Art Therapy class, also for a group project on Horticultural and Wilderness Therapy. The meditation goes:

“Put yourself in a comfortable position
 Take a few deep breaths and when you are ready you may close your eyes
 Try to clear your mind
 Clear away all the outside distractions, the stress of the day, any worries or fears, put it aside and focus on being present and breathing
 As you focus more and more on your breathing, you'll start to feel more relaxed
 Let yourself feel relaxed and calm as you become aware now of the journey you will be taking in a

few moments

I want to invite you now to prepare for this journey through inspiration and reflection on these words
Think now on colors, coming in waves, possessing your eyes, which see endless possibilities and a
passionate sense of potential

Shifting colors of grass

The perfect turquoise of the ocean

The velvet blackness of night

The gold and silvery moon

Let your imagination become strong and clear, able to see what it is you want to see

Allow your senses to become aware and at full attention of what is happening to these colors

To prepare further in thought, allow yourself to go to a place where there is potential to accept healing
and restoration, accept wisdom, accept the self, accept what your senses are giving you, and accept
change

Allow yourself a few moments to digest and adapt to this place and these preparations

(pause a few beats)

Charles Darwin said "Its not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that
survives, its the one that is most adaptable to change."

This statement makes an important point not only about natural selection, but about finding peace of
mind, personal happiness and overall life contentment

Everyone and everything goes through changes

Our environments change Our families change Our friends change

Our resources change Our theories on life change

Some people fight tooth and nail when change happens

Others hunker down and ride out the storm

And some tend to grab the bull by the horns and make the change work for them

Take a few moments now to reflect on how you adapt to change (pause 2-3 minutes)

I'll ask one more thing

What is it that you'd like to change in your life?

Or if there has already been a change in your life, how are you dealing with it?

(pause a few beats)

We cannot stop change from occurring, but we can learn to manage and accept its twists and turns

Change can ultimately help us grow

And personal growth can be the most rewarding change.

You may open your eyes."

The following semester, in the Fall of 2011, I wrote a meditation for an Art Therapy
Techniques group project that had to do with self-image, self-esteem and body image issues. I
really enjoyed writing this one because I struggle with body image issues myself. In the
meditation you are asked to thank your body for its healthy functions. It was really a fun
experience writing and doing the meditation myself. The meditation goes:

"Close your eyes

Observe your breath as it goes in and out

Whether its comfortable or uncomfortable

Broad or narrow, obstructed or free-flowing, fast or slow, short or long, warm or cool

Inhale the breath sensation beginning at your lips to the base of your skull and let it flow all the way
down your spine

Let your breaths energy separate and spread down your legs, into the soles of your feet, to the ends of

your toes and out into the air
 Let your breaths spread down over your shoulders, past your elbows, to your wrists, to the tips of your fingers and out into the air
 Inhale the breath right at the center of your chest, let it raise your torso, and let it go all the way down into your belly
 Let all these breath sensations spread in your body so they connect and flow together
 Keep your awareness as broad as possible (pause)
 Now as you relax deeper into your inner peace by the sensations and connections of your breath
 Ruminating on this question: "How do I feel about who I am?" (pause)
 As you evaluate yourself, also ask: "Do you value yourself?" (pause)
 Start to transition your thought process more closely related to your body, your dwelling, your physical appearance
 Have you heard these phrases of self-destruction before:
 "I'm fat. I'm too skinny. I'd be happy if I were taller, shorter, had curly hair, straight hair, a smaller nose, bigger muscles, or longer legs."
 Have you thought of any of these thoughts yourself? Do you have a specific self-destructive thought that has been holding you back?
 We tend to focus too much of the negative aspects of our relationship with our own bodies. Using those destructive, negative comments wears on our self-esteem and lowers how much we value ourselves.
 Try to think of an area or areas in which you struggle, an area of your body in which you have negative thoughts about and try to turn it into a positive area. Think of a positive contribution that area has made in your life.
 What comes up when you dwell on that area? Images? Colors? Words? Memories? (pause)
 Thank your body and yourself for what you have done to take care of yourself the best way you know how, despite your negative thoughts. Continue with these ideas and be gentle in thought. (pause)
 Now become aware of your breath sensations again and let the connections of breath in your body flow as you become present once again.
 When you are ready let your energy come back into the room and you may open your eyes."

The next meditation I have written is for an assignment in my Ecopsychology class I am taking now, in my last semester of Graduate school. The assignment was to write a nature biography: past and present. I came up with the words needed to describe both my past and present with nature, but it didn't feel complete so I wrote another meditation that has full meaning and significance to me when I'm experiencing nature. The meditation goes:

"Breathe
 Take in a breath of calm, and blow out all the stress in your mind
 Once you are comfortable and your heart has slowed go deeper into a relaxed state
 Become aware that you are like all living things growing and changing like a tree
 And like a tree you are tethered to the earth by your strong and supportive trunk
 Imagine yourself looking down at your feet, standing in soil and your body transforms into a tree
 A tree that has a beautiful and great trunk with roots deep into Mother Earth
 A tree that has branches outstretched and growing into time and space from your shoulders and your head and your arms into Father Sky
 Breathe in the air, Breathe in energy and purity, Breathe in light down into your body
 Take a few deep breaths and breathe in whatever it is that you need right now
 Love, acceptance, understanding, relief, compassion

Feel it enter through your branches and nourish the rest of you as it descends to your roots
 And breathe out anger, resentment, disappointment, or anything else that is lodged or pierced in your
 body now, let it fall away
 Let your body breathe from the earth and the sky exactly what it needs right now (Pause)
 You may feel overcome with emotion or you may be humbled
 When you feel grounded, start to feel Mother Earth push your roots back into your feet and legs
 And Father Sky allow your branches to return to your body
 Take a few breaths while this is happening, how does it feel?
 Thank Mother Earth for her nourishment and Father Sky too
 When you are ready you may bring yourself back to your body, back to awareness and you may open
 your eyes.”

Another meditation I've written is for another group project for my Ecopsychology and
 Meditation class this semester, Spring 2012, on sustainability. The meditation has characteristics
 of change and personal growth. It goes like this:

“Breathe deep into your belly and close your eyes
 Clear your mind of the things of the world
 Focus on your breathing, in and out, in and out,
 Relax and be present
 Let your body become calm and quiet as you breathe, in and out, in and out,
 Breathe in the center of your belly, a bright golden light of energy, let it cleanse away the
 distractions and toxins of the day
 Let the bright energy cleanse your mind
 Breathe in the energy
 Send the golden light throughout your body and let it cleanse as it moves through you
 As it does this, how is it changing you?
 Is the light becoming a different color?
 Can you feel your body healing?
 What's changing inside you?
 Is there something holding you back from healing?
 Can you see what it is holding you back?
 What does that look like?
 Open your mind and heart to the possibility of change and breathe in the bright golden light of energy
 once again into the center of yourself, into your belly
 Breathe it in and out, it may change color and form, but do not be afraid
 Change can be a good thing, breathe in change
 Let your mind become strong and clear, able to see what you want it to see
 Visualize the potential for healing and restoration, accept wisdom, accept what your senses are giving
 you and accept change
 Visualize peace and happiness and contentment
 Breathe in peace
 Visualize the things in your life that need attention in order to change, to be peaceful, to be happy and
 content
 What is it you need to change? How will you change it? How will you grow?
 Breathe in growth and light and let that sensation move through your belly up to your chest and out
 your arms and out to your finger tips
 Let the sensation move down your spine and out your legs and out the tips of your toes
 Let the sensation fill your body with warm light
 Feel growth move in you and notice how calm your body is

Embrace the idea that now that you have accepted the healing bright light of energy, of change that you are now able to radiate this healing light, this energy, this change to the world
 Breathe in and out, in and out
 Bring your body back to awareness and stretch and your legs and arms
 When you are fully ready, you may open your eyes.”

The most current meditation I've written was simply a relaxation meditation in addition to a group presentation for my Psychology of Art class on reducing stress. The meditation goes:

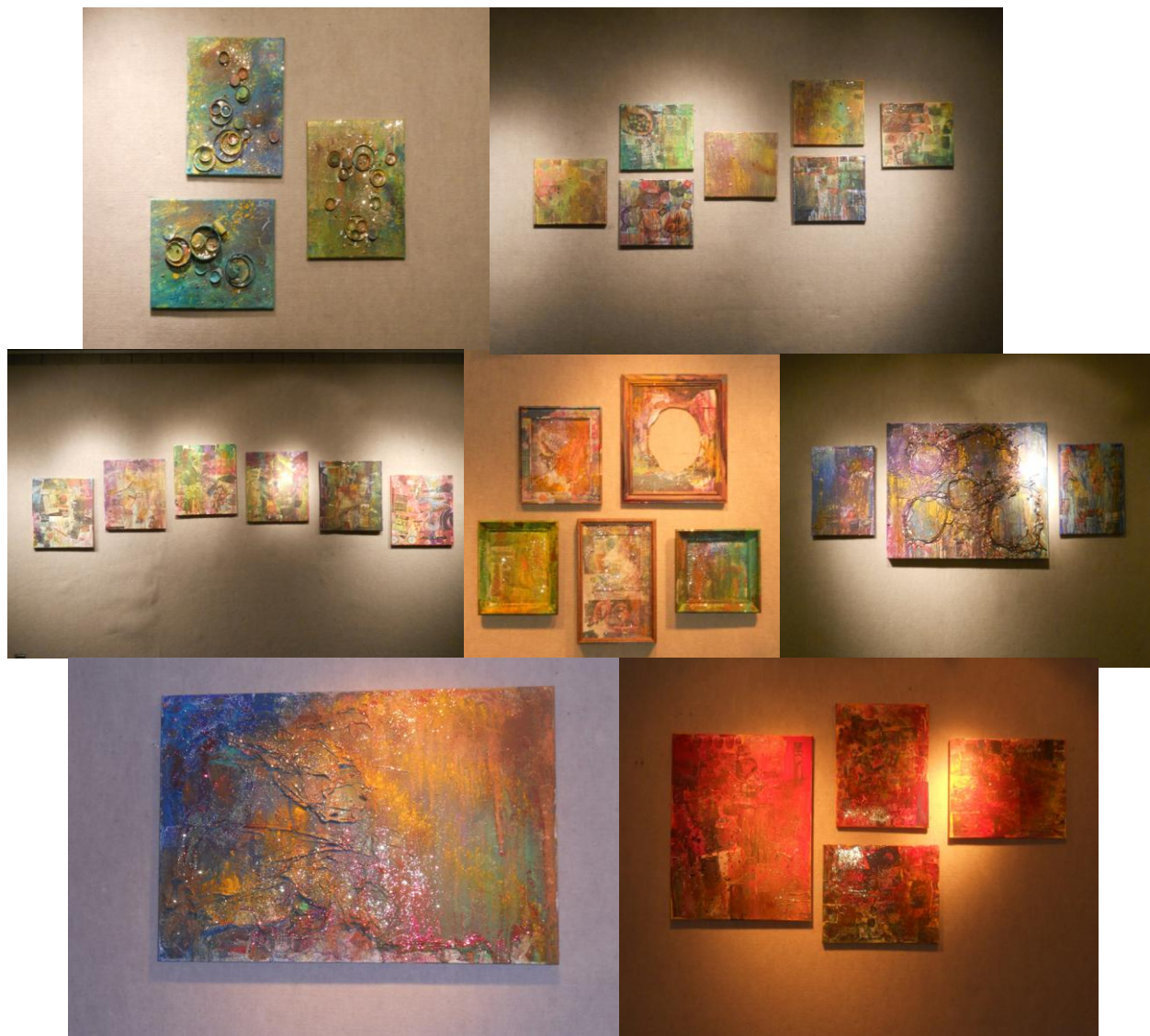
“Breathe in and close your eyes
 Breathe out all the stressfulness and worry from your body
 Breathe in and out, in and out
 Imagine yourself in a place near a river with willow trees along its path, dangling their branches and leaves in the water
 The river is gentle and warm
 Allow yourself to feel the cool air brush against your face
 Touch the water
 It's much warmer than the air so you wade in the water until you are near waist high
 As you wade, you feel a slightly stronger current from the North
 This allows you to decide to lie on your back in the water and float along the river
 As you are floating, you start to get the sensation that everything around you is green and lush
 Everything around you is breathing life into you
 The water around you cleanses and washes away all the thoughts that were previously in your mind
 The worries, the stresses, the anxieties, the fears, the challenges, All washed away
 You become the water, cleansing as you flow, nourishing, sustaining, breathing life
 Take a moment to notice what it feels like to be the warm river water (pause)
 When you notice all the things possible for you in being the water, you start to become aware that you are now just floating on your back as you were
 You notice the willow trees and the green lush vegetation near the banks once again and become restored, calm and burden free
 When you are ready, come back to consciousness and you may open your eyes.”

I tend to go into a deep level of consciousness while writing these meditations and they seem to spring from within spontaneously. Its a liberating feeling to get them out and I hope to continue to write and be inspired to write them. One day I may even record them and put a record together and sell it. A girl can dream.

Art

Lastly, the most personal way for coping is when I do art myself, for me. Over the last two years I feel as though I've developed a style. This is important to me. I let myself subside while the materials take over. I work mostly in mixed media, collage and painting with acrylics and I like to combine all three of those elements into one piece if possible. I also like using

spices on the drying paint to create a powdery texture atop the work. My most literal order of process would be as follows: Take a canvas, layer it with glue, add collage elements like paper and clippings, another layer of glue on top of that, pour paint on and manipulate with hands and fingers, splash water over it all and allow it to permeate the paint still manipulating with hands and splashing water, allow it all to drip in different directions or in one direction and then sprinkle spices and glitter onto the canvas and finally lay it flat to dry. I do all of this in my bath tub for sanitary purposes. Doing it in the tub also allows my physical body to get into it and be free-flowing and really letting the materials do what they can do, sort of letting the materials take control of the artwork. Here are several photos of a collection of works I put in my Graduate Art Exhibit called "The Spice is Right."



Having an exhibit was very rewarding for me not only because I got to show my work, but also because it was validating. My process of making my art is part of me, its part of my inner child facing the world today, in my past and for my future. This “formula” is my own and it's evolving all the time. Sometimes a piece doesn't turn out like I'd hoped so I may do it over again or I'll leave that piece be a reminder that I'm not in control when I make art, but the materials are. In this respect, the rhyme or reason for my formula is to let go, to be freed of pressure and standard, and let it become a therapeutic experience in itself. In translation: it is my escape.

I feel a strong connection with the paint as it gets under my fingernails and runs down my hands because those moments are so unique and messy and therapeutic. It feels like there are no rules. There's also a level of anxiety, excitement and anticipation because the paint seems so thick with layers of glue underneath that you don't know if any of the collage will come through, and when it does, or doesn't, it's a thrill to know what's under there when others might not see or know. In a way, my art is a lot like me. I have many layers, like an artichoke. There are parts of my personality that I show to everyone on a daily basis, but if you look closer and get to know me there's another world to discover underneath the surface that don't normally shine through. Only the people that really look will know about. This is probably why I love doing art the way I've been doing it- because it speaks to me, about me.

These three elements, yoga, the practice and writing of meditations, and making art have changed the way I take care of myself. I've responded so easily to each of these things because on one level they seem uncomplicated and help me escape from the thoughts, fears, anxieties and challenges of this bedraggling world, and also from the stress of being an art therapy intern. These three things combined have made me feel like a different person, like a new person, born to do what I'm studying, able to help people through art and provide that therapeutic experience to the world, whoever that may be. I can easily say now, that I'm confident in practicing art therapy because of the physical and mental strengths that yoga and meditation have given me, but also and most importantly, because every time I make art, I'm practicing art therapy myself.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

There are several things that perhaps continue to fascinate me about autism and the use of art therapy. There is no doubt that autism looks different for each person who is diagnosed with it. It doesn't render anyone incapable of doing and succeeding at art, especially when the therapeutic aspect is utilized.

In my first chapter, I mentioned two films and Brooke's book on creative interventions, among other sources. In the first film mentioned, *Loving Lampposts* (Drezner, 2010), the filmmaker's son who loves lampposts and is diagnosed with autism, could be viewed as a "devastation" because autism can't be "cured," but to others he is a boy who has autism and sees the world in a very different and sometimes confusing but altogether interesting way. The parents in the film who viewed autism as a "devastation" spent more time focusing on finding a cure for autism, but didn't understand autism as a mental disorder that has symptoms that can be managed, not cured. The idea that the film gives on "acceptance" of the diagnosis, focuses on embracing the child's personality and managing symptoms by teaching skills for a healthy and happy life.

In Brooke's book, the example was given about Steven and how he started, timidly and cautiously in art therapy, because of his hyper-anxiety, but as time and art therapy directives went on, Steven could grasp a "whole picture" element to the world he lives in.

The example of Steven gives an insight to my fascination of the art that I've been doing with Kayla. She continues to amaze me with her artwork, for a 6-year-old girl with autism spectrum disorder, PDD-NOS, and OCD with poor insight, she is so bright beyond her diagnostic limitations. I love working with children who are unique in such a way that they are able to

overcome their diagnostic symptoms through art therapy. With Kayla, my hope is that the emotional outbursts that she has over food, rigidity of sameness, lack of social skills, her OCD tendencies, and the many triggers that evoke emotional outbursts, continue to decrease over time and working with her on art therapy and a mixture of cognitive-behavioral conditioning methods and approaches will help in that way.

Kayla and I will continue to work together through Heartland Kids until she reaches her goals of building social skills, overcome food issues and reduce emotional outbursts significantly. Until this happens she will need services. It is such a joy to know that she has already come this far since July of 2011, it hasn't been a full year yet and she continues to improve nearly every time I see her. I'm glad to be a part of what is going on at Heartland Kids and thankful to have been able to experience art therapy as an intern through the organization. In the future, I think Kayla will experience other services like the one provided through Heartland Kids. Heartland Kids and I have laid the ground work and hopefully will be maintained through Kayla and her parent's persistent practice in cognitive-behavioral conditioning practice, and also that Kayla continues to make art for herself and as a way to find balance for her emotions. In this way, I hope that Kayla is able to see the world in a "whole picture" kind of way, like previously stated with the case example of Steven (Brooke, 2009).

Its a challenge to do the work I do. Challenges are good sometimes, because if you were never challenged at anything, mediocrity would be the norm. I do not believe in mediocrity and that is why I challenge myself with such work, and because I am good at it. I'm also very aware that if I don't take care of myself, it will be most inevitable that I will crash and burn. What I mean is that, if I don't keep up with my self care rituals, I will most likely start to dislike my work. I never want that to happen, so I do yoga to help me keep going.

Yoga is one of my favorite ways to unwind from a stressful day at work with Kayla, especially on days where she has multiple emotional outbursts, yoga is the glue that seems to hold me together. I consider yoga a gift, in a way, because it motivates me to be a better person.

I feel the same way about practicing and writing meditations. I feel like this is a much more recent inspiration in my life and the feedback I receive when I share my meditations is resounding with positivity. It's a feel-good kind of love that I have for writing meditations.

Making art for me has also been my "saving grace" sometimes, same with doing yoga, especially when I've had a challenging day at work and I feel like ripping my hair out, getting out a canvas and pouring glue and paint on it and getting messy with it allows me to escape from that stress, relieve that stress, and it makes me feel better and happy.

Yoga, practicing and writing meditations and making art have kept me balanced. Without these three things, I'd probably not be this far in life- getting my Master's degree in Art Therapy from the University of Wisconsin-Superior, or be a Mental Health Practitioner for Heartland Kids- and I'm proud to say that being persistent with these three things can take me anywhere, and I hope they do.

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