

**Education in Emotional Intelligence: An Arts Therapies Based Method**

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### **Abstract**

By age 11, children are expected to have developed healthy, appropriate, and controlled emotional and social literacy. They should have learned basic social norms, the ability to regulate their emotions, and a strong sense of empathy. These lessons in emotional intelligence prepare children for the roles they will play in adolescence and adulthood. Unfortunately, due to the shift in social interactions from in-person to virtual, children's emotional intelligence might be at a risk of decline. Fortunately, studies support that the expressive arts therapies can improve interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and behaviors. This thesis aims to develop and implement a method to facilitate emotional intelligence in school-age children. Specifically, it showcases the potential of the expressive arts therapies used in the method. To test the hypothesis that expressive arts therapy can facilitate emotional intelligence in school-age children, a 15-week online expressive arts therapy experiential was implemented to eight children from an outpatient mental health clinic. In the virtual setting, children participated in fifteen activities based on four expressive arts therapy modalities. Each child's ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions in the self and in the other was assessed using the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) before and after the 15-week long experiential. The results showed what was hypothesized: emotional intelligence in school-age children. These results suggest new ways to improve the facilitation of emotional intelligence in children. On this basis, the use of the expressive arts therapies should be considered when furthering and promoting emotional intelligence.

*Keywords:* children, emotional intelligence, emotional literacy, social literacy, child development, creative arts therapies

### **Education in Emotional Intelligence: An Arts Therapies Based Method**

The coronavirus pandemic led to the shift from in-person to virtual social interactions. Researchers suggested that this shift has created a decline in child development and cultivation of emotional and social literacy skills (Duan et al., 2020). These skills, often learned and cultivated in an in-person school setting, allow children to adjust to significant life changes within their respective social circles, physical growth during adolescence, and cranial development throughout life. Social distancing, limited gatherings, and stay-at-home orders have affected children's abilities to socialize, learn, communicate, and experience life as a youth, which may play a role in child mental health (Schiavo, 2020). Without physical interaction or education on these specific skills, children may soon suffer developmentally.

One developmental milestone for school-age children is marked by the successful development of emotional and social literacy skills, which are collectively referred to as emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence and socialization at this age become of central importance in children's lives, impacting their overall health, morality, and cognitive functions. Children are expected to develop the ability to recognize and articulate their own emotions and the ability to identify and empathize with the emotions of others. This development of emotional intelligence impacts one's learning, one's communication skills, one's ability to build and sustain healthy relationships with oneself and the other, and one's physical and mental health (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Without these skills, children are at a greater risk to experience poor school performance, unhealthy social interactions, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse (Busu, 2020; Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2016; Samson et al., 2020).

During traumatic life events such as a global pandemic, it is important to foster a child's emotional intelligence. The isolation during this pandemic may ensure safety, but it may also

increase social anxiety and separation anxiety (Pelham, 2020), which may impact a child's ability to regulate emotion and empathize with others (Benner & Mistry, 2020). Though there is little data on the impact of pandemics on child development, Benner and Mistry (2020) support evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on academic, social, and emotional trajectories of children will unfold negatively over time.

Auspiciously, the effectiveness of the expressive arts (e.g., dance/movement, visual arts, music, theatre/drama, writing, etc.) in improving physical, mental, emotional, academic, and social health is widely known. However, researchers have considered and investigated whether expressive arts therapies can be utilized to improve these domains. Lazareva and Rudakova (2018) found that the use of arts therapy methods—specifically role-playing emotions, reflection of emotional states through drawing, and exploring character emotional states through literary work—contribute to the development of emotional intelligence in preschool children. Work by Năstăsă (2014) supports that the expressive arts therapies group intervention facilitates emotional self-awareness, emotional self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills in people in early adulthood. Brathwaite (2017) used therapeutic arts—specifically dance/movement and music therapies—in the elderly to explore the subsequent development of logical intelligence and emotional intelligence, supporting the idea that emotional intelligence can be facilitated with the expressive arts therapies. With the use of expressive arts therapies, child emotional intelligence might be able to be improved, even in a time when physical interaction is limited.

This thesis offers an exploratory study of the effects of expressive arts therapies on emotional intelligence. The methods implemented use expressive arts therapy activities and theories to determine whether and how emotional intelligence in children can be facilitated via a virtual setting. The main goals of this project were (A) to examine ways to facilitate child

emotional and social literacy skills; (B) to develop an online fifteen-week expressive arts therapy group aimed at emotional intelligence education; (C) to implement said method; and (D) to establish any suggestions about the relation between the expressive arts therapy interventions used and their effect on emotional intelligence in children. The aforementioned suggestions were gleaned through a content analysis of data gathered through emotional intelligence assessments.

It was hypothesized that this project would teach better methods and strategies to help improve child emotional and social literacy skills, especially in a virtual setting. While much work has been done to facilitate emotional intelligence using the expressive arts therapies, further investigation on their effectiveness and other implementation of said therapies is also possible and should be explored. This project begins to introduce a curriculum on emotional intelligence for school age children, acknowledging that utilizing the expressive arts therapies might be an excellent place to start. Evidence of its positive effects is discussed, and support for cultivation of this method is examined.

## **Literature Review**

### **Emotional Intelligence**

While it can be argued that to be emotionally intelligent is to exist in a contradiction with assertions that emotion contrasts with logic or with rationality and thus with intelligence, most researchers agree that “emotion” and “intelligence” can exist in tandem. In 1990, Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer coined the term *emotional intelligence*, defining it as “a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action” (p. 189). Emotional intelligence, measured as an ability, involves the appropriate and intelligent use of emotions to inform our thinking, interacting, and reacting. It involves an intelligent level of

mastery of self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, and relationship management. To truly master emotional intelligence, one must cultivate their abilities to recognize emotions in the self and the other, to understand emotions of the self or the other, to label emotions with specificity, to understand how and when to express emotions, and to regulate emotions. These abilities will then sequentially influence success at school, at home, in the community, in society, and in the future (Housman, 2017; MacCann et al., 2019; Waller, 2006).

To cultivate an understanding of emotional intelligence, one must first develop a conception of emotions. Oatley (2007) defined emotions as the physical and mental effects “typically caused by evaluations . . . of events in relation to what is important to us: our goals, our concerns, our aspirations” (p. 3). Simply put, emotions are the psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses to an internal or external event. As a species, we have evolved to use emotions to take action, to survive, and, arguably most importantly, to understand ourselves and others. While it is believed that there is a wide myriad of universal emotions experienced by people regardless of culture, the emotional experience is also a highly subjective psychological one. Part of emotional intelligence involves understanding the coexistence of the universality and the subjectivity of emotion to develop a healthy sense of mental equilibrium and empathy. The rest involves understanding that to know emotion within the other starts with analytically and experientially knowing the emotion within the self (Winans, 2012).

### **Measuring Emotional Intelligence**

Researchers have computed ways to measure emotional intelligence. Williams et al. (2009) identified and implemented two methods to measure emotional intelligence in 598 children aged 10-11 in an effort to examine the relationship between trait emotional intelligence, emotional ability, and psychopathology in children: self-assessment tools and task performance.

While the study supported that self-assessment measurements accurately indicate emotional intelligence skills and task performance measurements weakly indicate emotional intelligence skills (Williams et al., 2009), the study's main results discussed and reflected differences in emotional intelligence abilities across the sexes.

Contrastly, the findings of Brackett and Salovey (2006) suggest low correlation between self-assessment measurements and task performance measurement scores. Brackett and Salovey implemented the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) to measure emotional intelligence based on the four branches of the emotional intelligence model of Mayer and Salovey: (A) perceiving emotion; (B) facilitating thought; (C) understanding emotion; and (D) managing emotion. Their findings suggest that the MSCEIT is a reliable scoring system with room to test its validity (Brackett & Salovey, 2006).

In an effort to maximize the findings of both of these studies, both self-assessment emotional intelligence measurement tools and the MSCEIT will be used in this thesis to measure and track emotional intelligence as an ability. Acknowledging the social components of emotional intelligence, the focus will be on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

### **Emotional Intelligence and Expressive Arts Therapies**

Children learn emotions at an early age, first experiencing, perceiving, and expressing emotions as a way to maximize on desired responses from their caregivers. Eventually, in infancy, children first begin to regulate their emotions, often self-soothing by sucking on hands or fingers. They then begin to recognize emotion in the other, often responding to emotions with tears, smiles, or laughter. As children grow, they begin to recognize emotions as powerful instruments and use them accordingly. Whether subconsciously, unconsciously, or consciously,

they begin to use emotions as an exploratory tool for social competence and an alert for their personal defense system (Thompson, 1991). Work by Salovey and Mayer (1990) suggests that without a proper grasp on emotional intelligence, children are at risk to fail in learning motivation, develop poor problem-solving skills, and internalize alexithymia. Fortunately, there are ways and means to develop emotional intelligence.

Waller (2006) discussed how the expressive arts therapies serve as an effective tool for emotion recognition, emotion expression, emotional competence, and the communication of emotion. Using a humanistic approach to expressive arts therapy, Waller emphasized the importance of emotion perception in the self and the other. Throughout the study, Waller questioned whether attachment theory speaks on the effects art therapy has on emotional intelligence and addresses shortcomings on exploration in this area. However, based on personal accounts, Waller was able to demonstrate the positive effects of expressive arts therapy on social and emotional literacy skills.

In an attempt to improve communication, cooperation, emotion recognition, and identity enforcement skills, Mynaříková (2012) developed and implemented an 8-week arts therapy group of 25 children aged 11-12. By incorporating expressive arts therapy into each week's session (each session began with a warm-up activity; moved into an intermodal expressive arts therapy activity, which usually combined art, music, and drama therapy; and ended with a discussion), Mynaříková allowed children to explore emotion, emotional expression, and social literacy on their own and in groups. Using self-assessment tools and evaluations of classroom environment/atmosphere at the beginning and end of the arts therapy group, Mynaříková tracked an improvement in components of emotional intelligence, such as social cooperation, camaraderie, and tolerance.

Acknowledging the inherent components of expressive arts therapy (i.e., the focus on one's feelings and experiences, the focus on the creative process, and the use of control in self-expression) and their beneficial effects on emotional intelligence, Lazareva and Rudakova (2018) utilized expressive arts therapy (art therapy, music therapy, drama therapy, dance and movement therapy, and fairytale therapy) to first assess emotional intelligence and then to improve emotional intelligence in preschool children. While the study solely focused on components of emotional intelligence, including emotion perception, emotion identification, and determining the causes of emotion occurrence, the results of the study support that expressive arts therapy tools and activities contribute to emotional intelligence development.

The results of a study by Freilich and Schechtman (2010) demonstrated that art therapy contributes to the positive adjustment in social, emotional, and academic skills in among children with learning disabilities. Using a self-assessment questionnaire and gleaning information from teacher observations, the study supports the use of expressive art therapy, specifically visual arts therapies, to improve social and emotional literacy skills (Freilich & Schechtman, 2010).

Ali (2017) developed expressive arts therapy interventions for children based on Mayer and Solvey's four branch model of emotional intelligence to improve emotional intelligence as a dynamic trait. While her findings suggest expressive arts therapies can be a catalyst for emotional comprehension, competence, and expression in children, they also suggest the need for more quantitative studies on the matter.

## **Conclusion**

These earlier studies successfully offer a framework for social and emotional development interventions and programs. However, each study acknowledges that these programs are still in their initial stages of development and have much room to expand to

improve effectiveness. In summation, this thesis will derive its method development from these studies and their findings, incorporating combinations of expressive arts therapy interventions and using multiple methods of emotional intelligence measurement, primarily the MSCEIT based on the emotional intelligence model proposed by Mayer and Salovey (2006) and the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire - Adolescent Short Form (TEIQue-ASF) as utilized by Williams et al. (2009).

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The program designed at fostering emotional intelligence in children was introduced to this researcher by the director of a youth mentoring program of an outpatient mental health clinic. Eight children aged 9-11 from the youth mentoring program joined the 15-week program voluntarily. The outpatient mental health clinic organization's youth mentoring program primarily services people of an underrepresented minority group (i.e., African Americans, Latino Americans, Pacific Islander Americans, Asian Americans, Multiracial Americans). Thus, each child belonged to one of these groups. Three of the children's mentors joined the emotional intelligence program, serving as the children's chaperones. The program was approved by the director of the youth mentoring program. Participation in the program was voluntary, and participants could quit the program at any time they wished.

### **Design**

Once a week over a period of fifteen weeks, this researcher worked virtually with the children to determine ways in which arts therapies can improve and facilitate emotional intelligence. This researcher, the children, and their mentors met via a video conferencing app. Data collection took place between November 2020 and February 2021.

The program tracked self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management facets of emotional intelligence by implementing methods to teach and measure said facets. Each week incorporated a new objective surrounding emotional intelligence improvement. Each session was comprised of a warm-up portion, in which the facilitator led an activity to introduce the theme and goal of the day; an arts therapy invention portion, in which the facilitator led an arts therapy activity that addressed the day's theme and goal; and a sharing portion, in which the facilitator led a discussion amongst the children. All records were kept using an arts journal with mostly writing and some small drawings.

### **Teaching Emotional Intelligence**

#### ***Week 1 & Week 2: Emotional Self Awareness***

In the first two weeks of the program, the group focused on emotional self-awareness. The goal of the first week was to have the children recognize emotion within the self. Because each child had access to visual arts materials, the program began with art therapy. During the warm-up portion that week, the children were first directed to think about all the emotions they had ever felt. Children took turns naming emotions, and the facilitator made a list on her shared computer screen within the video conference. Next, the children were directed to draw their personal representations of each emotion identified in the warm-up portion. Finally, children were encouraged to share their artwork and the group discussed any themes or patterns they found within their work.

The goal of the second week was to have the children enable a sense of safety around the sharing of feelings. For the warm-up portion of that week, the children were directed to experiment with music. This therapist utilized music therapy this week to encourage collaboration. The children used markers, pencils, crayons, or their own hands to play rhythms

on their desks, tables, or bodies. They were prompted to play softly, then loudly, then happily, then angrily, and so on. For the arts therapy activity portion, the children were each assigned an emotion (e.g. happiness, anger, sadness, fear, pride, etc.) and asked to present to the group a rhythm they created to convey their assigned emotions. Then, the children were asked to present their rhythms simultaneously to create a new sound, a new emotion. During the sharing portion of the session, children spoke about what presenting their emotion elicited and what playing a song together elicited.

### ***Week 3 & Week 4: Emotional Self Control***

In the third and fourth weeks of the program, the group focused on emotional self-control. The goal of the third week was to have the children enhance self-expression. Because the children responded well to the visual arts, the utilization of art therapy was continued. For the warm-up portion, children were prompted to write about the emotions they feel on the inside and the emotions they express on the outside. After writing about the emotions, the children were prompted to make two-sided masks with paper and markers or crayons or paint or coloring pencils. For the sharing portion, the children took turns wearing their masks and interacting with the group.

The goal of the fourth week was to have the children expand the range of their emotional repertoire. Because of its inherent facilitation of self-control, a combination of play therapy and drama therapy became the focus of this week. Children were first prompted to interact with each other using the masks again. Then the facilitator led a game using the masks that were made the week prior. The facilitator prompted the children to try on different masks/play with different emotions for hypothetical situations. For the sharing portion, the children spoke about what was helpful and what wasn't helpful about the game.

***Week 5: Adaptability***

In the fifth week, the group focused on adaptability. The goal of the fifth week was to teach the children coping skills to apply when met with unfamiliar or unwanted emotions. Because the activities in the previous weeks encouraged collaboration, this week's focus shifted to a more solitary activity so as to facilitate adaptability. The children were prompted to write about a time when their emotions felt unfamiliar, unwanted, or extreme. The children then were prompted to "re-write" the event by writing about what would have happened had they experienced another emotion or had something else happened. The children then took turns sharing their stories and discussing ways they would cope with others' unfamiliar and unwanted emotions.

***Week 6 & Week 7: Influence of the Self***

In the sixth and seventh weeks, the group focused on the influence of the self on emotion. The goal of the sixth week was to explore positive outlook in relation to the self. The goal of the seventh week was to explore negative outlook in relation to the self. Because emotion can exist heavily within the body, both weeks incorporated dance/movement therapy to explore these goals. For both weeks, the children were first prompted to explore movement in their hands, then their arms, then their torsos, then their entire bodies. In the sixth week, the children were prompted to express different emotions they found positive through movement. In the seventh week, children were prompted to express different emotions they found negative through movement. After the main activity of both weeks, children were asked individually to perform one movement that summed up their experience for the week. The children repeated each movement as a group.

***Week 8 & Week 9: Empathy***

In the eighth and ninth weeks, the group focused on empathy. The goal of the eighth week was to understand emotional range within the other. Because through play therapy children learn problem solving and communication skills, the program reintroduced play therapy this week. To warm up for that week, the children were each assigned an emotion and had to express emotion through a prop (e.g. a pencil, a paper towel, a coaster, etc.). Then, the children played a game of emotion charades to guess which emotion each person was expressing. Then the group spoke about any mistakes they might have made in guessing another's assigned emotion.

The goal of the ninth week was to connect the emotion within the other to the emotion within the self. The program reintroduce art therapy this week in hopes that the children would find the activity more familiar. For the main portion of this week, the children created emotion wheels based upon the emotional expressions they viewed the week prior. Emotion wheels were circles separated into eight parts, one for each emotion identified in the group. The children then created images, placed colors, or drew lines within the part of the circle that corresponded to the emotion in question. Then the children took time to present their emotion wheels and spoke about any similarities or differences they saw in each other's emotion wheel.

### ***Week 10 & Week 11: Influence of the Other***

In the tenth and eleventh weeks, the group focused on the influence of the other on emotion. The goal of the tenth week was to explore positive outlook in relation to the other. To allow the children to focus on how others privately and personally influenced their emotions, the children were directed to utilize music therapy and writing therapy, and they were encouraged to do so in silence. The facilitator began the tenth week by asking the children to think about the members of their households. The children then wrote about each member of their household and the emotions they most often expressed. The children then took time to hum a musical

representation of what they had written while their microphones were muted, and each child shared a bit about what they had hummed or written.

The goal of the eleventh week was to explore negative outlook in relation to the other. Play therapy became the focus of this week so that the children could create more distance between what they felt and what they experienced. The children began by identifying a set of emojis that the facilitator showed to the group. Then the children created their own emojis and told stories in the third person about each emoji. The children then shared what resonated with them from each other's stories and what did not resonate.

### ***Week 12 & Week 13: Conflict Management***

In the twelfth and thirteenth weeks, the group focused on conflict management. The goal of the twelfth week was to implement stress management techniques. The program reintroduced drama therapy this week so that the children might explore different roles within a relationship. The facilitator began the session by running vocal exercises with the group along with facial exercises. Then the facilitator told scenarios of conflict and assigned each child a character within the scenario. The group then spoke about effective and ineffective ways to address the conflict.

The goal of the thirteenth week was to increase body awareness in moments of conflict. The program shifted to movement therapy so that the children could recognize changes within the body and breath. The facilitator began the session by asking the children to embody stress and pretend they were "all the things that made them worrisome or fearsome or frustrated." The children were asked to recognize their somatic and sensory changes in the body. Then the children followed deep breathing techniques to lessen those changes. The group spoke about what was and wasn't helpful to lessen those somatic and sensory changes.

***Week 14 & Week 15: Teamwork***

In the fourteenth and fifteen weeks, the group focused on teamwork. The goal of the fourteenth week was to recognize the benefits of group support. Each child took turns talking about their days and the children spoke about how times they felt a similar way. The children then worked as a group to tell the story of another member of the group using visual storytelling. The children then discussed the activity. This modality was utilized to foster a sense of unity within the group.

The goal of the fifteenth week was to utilize the benefits of group support. At the end of the previous week, the children were assigned to bring five found objects that represented how the last fourteen weeks had felt to them. The children told their stories using the found objects and each child commented on what resonated with them in the stories told. To give the children a sense of control over the termination of the group, this modality was utilized for the final week.

**Measuring Emotional Intelligence**

Before and after the fifteen week program, the children met with their mentors to complete self-questionnaires that measured their personal perception of their emotional intelligence levels and a modified version of the MSCEIT that measured their objective level of emotional intelligence. The self-questionnaire, based on the TEIQue-ASF, was comprised of 30 items in which the children were asked to rate statements like “I can control my anger when I want to” on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). For the MSCEIT, children were (A) asked to identify emotions and feelings expressed in photographs of people’s faces and suggested by artistic designs and landscapes; (B) asked to imagine an emotion and connect the emotion to a sensory modality from a given list; (C) asked to analyze blended emotions and assess how emotional reactions change over time; and (D) asked to read a short story about

another person and then determine how effective several different courses of action would be in coping with emotions in the story, rating the effectiveness on a scale from very ineffective to very effective.

### **Results**

The following results were collected in an arts journal after each session and have been revised for ease of comprehension.

#### **Week One**

There is a sense of shyness and uncertainty within the group. They are all listening to my instructions but have a clear hesitation in doing so. Most of the artwork being created is very colorful and bright. There is a trend in using yellows and oranges to convey happiness, red to convey anger, and blue to convey sadness. There is one child using one color for all of his representations of emotion. The children are only speaking amongst themselves when prompted to do so, though they smile as they create the art.

#### **Week Two**

The children seem to be more inclined to participate in this week's activity than last week's as evidenced by louder and more frequent laughter. The children were asked to create a new emotion, which they named Laminark, based on a rhythm/song the group composed simultaneously. In discussion, the children spoke about enjoying doing work together. One child mentioned that working together on a rhythm inspired him to play with rhythm more often.

#### **Week Three**

The children mostly remained silent for this session, but some children were humming quietly to themselves. The children seem to be learning more words to reflect and communicate emotions from each other as evidenced by their mimicking/copying of each other's words.

During the discussion, the children seemed to speak about the art they made without commenting on the art shared by the other children.

#### **Week Four**

The children seem more inclined to share their artwork. There is a more obvious expression of emotion both in the children and their artwork. The children are speaking more to me and asking more questions about why I agreed to lead the program and whether we would be playing every week. There are a couple of children who follow the directive but mostly remain silent.

#### **Week Five**

There are some children sending private messages in the video conference apps. The children sent questions asking about the aesthetic worth of their work and whether they would have to share their work with the group. These questions were answered by this researcher out loud to the group as a whole with sentences like “Remember that the word ‘good’ is subjective. As long as it feels right to you then it is exactly what I am looking for” and “No one has to share if they don’t want to.” I found it interesting that the children asking these questions still shared their work with the group.

#### **Week Six**

There are some children who seem more confident to share and talk than the others. This week, everyone performed a movement but only a handful of the group used big and powerful movements in their expression. I am wondering if this week’s directive was too hard to follow or too difficult to address.

#### **Week Seven**

Movement is proving to be a preferred method of self-expression. The children were all engaged for the full duration of the session. The children did a great job repeating movements back to each other. The children ended the session with smiles and laughter. One child thanked me for the work we had been doing and so the others thanked me as well.

### **Week Eight**

Everyone seems to be very engaged in the games we played this week. There was a discrepancy between two of the participants and when addressed in a group setting, there seemed to be a positive outcome. In discussion, the children said they enjoyed the challenge of the activity, and they many mentioned that they would like to play again.

### **Week Nine**

This seems to be the least favorite activity so far. The children said they would like to interact with each other again and that creating the emotion wheels was not as fun as interacting with each other. I wonder if the order of the directives should be ordered differently to achieve a greater sense of accomplishment and encourage the children to be more inclined to participate.

### **Week Ten**

The children are more engaged than they were last week. There is a lot of communicating amongst the group and children seem more inclined to communicate when they do not understand something or would like to not participate. There were two children who spoke about the directive being confusing and another child expressing a disinterest in the activity. I wonder if this activity was not interpersonal enough.

### **Week Eleven**

The children seemed to have a lot of fun with this activity as evidenced by their desire to continue the warm-up section of this week. Creating a new emoji, I think, was a good way to

connect with the children as many of them used emojis in their visual representations of emotions. The children gave their emojis a name and created backstories for each emoji/character. Based on what I know about the children, the stories seemed to reflect what each child was experiencing in their personal lives.

### **Week Twelve**

This was my favorite activity with the group so far. It is easy to tell that the children are learning and growing. They seem to be verbally reflecting on their own experiences more openly and listening actively when others share. There was mild hesitation in what they offered as a solution to each scenario, but the children all participated, giving comments and asking questions.

### **Week Thirteen**

The children surprised me by following this week's directive. They had given so much energy in the weeks preceding that I imagined having them sit still for a large amount of time to be difficult. Deep breathing exercises seemed to be beneficial to the children as evidenced by a more cohesive energy felt within the group.

### **Week Fourteen**

I took time to remind the children that we were going to be ending our session soon, and they all expressed distress or confusion. The children seem to be continuing to bond well. They tell and listen to stories very well and are responding to each with an appropriate affect and mood.

### **Week Fifteen**

This was the last group session and I am feeling very bittersweet. This was my favorite week to observe. The way the children played with each object was heart-breaking, inspiring,

and breathtaking all at once. The children took turns saying goodbye to each other using the objects, without being prompted, and I found that very beautiful. .

### **Emotional Intelligence Measurement**

The emotional intelligence of the participants was measured using self-report and trait ability measures. These measures of the program reveal agreeing conclusions that the expressive arts therapies can facilitate emotional intelligence in school-age children. The children scored higher in both measures in their second exam than in the first exam given fifteen weeks prior. Additional observational report measures by this researcher suggest that the children all developed a stronger ability to express and regulate emotion, empathize with others, and perform in a group.

### **Discussion**

This thesis explored ways to facilitate child emotional and social literacy skills. The hypothesis in this thesis was supported, with the data showing that utilization of expressive arts therapies in emotional intelligence facilitation is positively correlated. Over the 15-week period, emotional intelligence of each child matured, as evidenced by the expansion of each child's emotional repertoire, the collective improvement of conflict management skills, and more frequently observed empathy.

An important aspect of the emotional intelligence training is the social interaction that occurs within the group. During the beginning stages of group development, people within the group do not tend to perform at peak effectiveness. It is vital to note that the participants within this program had a pre-established social relationship before the program began. It would be interesting to analyze how group dynamics play a role in task performance within a group

setting, especially in a virtual group setting. More experimentation can be done to assess any patterns there.

Each child performed the given tasks/directives well and without much confusion. As gleaned from journaling, observations of the group suggest the children perform more exceptionally when utilizing arts and/or play therapy. It is important, however, to note that due to the virtual nature of the program, the children had little to no access to musical instruments or open space. As a result of this, they could not maximize on the range of expression offered by music therapy, dance/movement therapy, or drama therapy. While the program incorporated adaptations to expressive arts therapy activities within each modality to compensate for this, it is evident that more research will need to be conducted to determine more just observations.

The program of this thesis showed that the most important requirements of teaching emotional intelligence are active listening, a strong lexicon for feelings, a development of self-awareness, and an appreciation for empathy.

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***THESIS APPROVAL FORM***

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Expressive Therapies Division  
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**Student's Name:** \_\_\_\_Tatiana Nya Ford\_\_\_\_\_

**Type of Project:** Thesis

**Title:** \_\_Education in Emotional Intelligence: An Arts Therapies Based Method\_\_\_\_\_

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

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