



INTRODUCTION

Autism is defined as “a broad range of disorders characterized by interference with communication and social interactions and circular patterns of interest, activities, and behavior” (Epp, 27). Difficulty with communication can be remedied by using creative outlets to express oneself. For children on the autistic spectrum, exposure to creative outlets, including visual arts, can be extremely beneficial to their development (Lacour). There should be more extensive studies based on the benefits of art therapy, so more people will be willing to participate in this type of therapy (Mirabella, 198).

METHODOLOGIES

- Primary inquiry approach: case study research
 - Used to focus on the impacts of art on specific individuals
 - Phenomenological research
 - In-depth study of people’s experiences with art and autism
- Data collection: scholarly journals, interviews, online research

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTERVIEWS

PROGRAM DESIGN

FINDINGS

EXPRESSION & CREATIVITY

Difficulty with communication can be remedied by the use of creative outlets as a form of expression (Epp, 27). Through art, individuals can share their thoughts and emotions.

“Art was the **entry way** into him being very creative. Maybe he was creative all along and didn’t know how to express it, but once he was able to **express** it and have an outlet for it, it was something that he could actually do.”

— Cheryl, a mother

NATURAL TALENT & CONFIDENCE

Children with autism may struggle with self-esteem issues; society often sends the message that individuals with such conditions are not as valued as other members of society. By receiving a positive response to a talent, an individual’s self-esteem can increase. The accomplishment of completing an art piece or exploring art mediums can boost the confidence of a child with ASD (Lacour). In addition, certain case studies suggest there may be a correlation between artistic talent and autism (Furniss, 2).

“It has been really meaningful seeing him being able to do something really well, and having people being **impressed** by that. People that don’t spend a lot of time around your child don’t see him as very relational, and yet, it kind of rounds out the whole person when they see a talent and evidence of that. They take another **perspective** on the child.”

— Cheryl, a mother

“My husband, my parents, and I are always telling him **how good it is**. [His confidence] has gotten to the point where he will bring [his art] up on his phone, and he will **show people** work that he has done, and they’ll even **praise** it.”

— Kristyn, a mother

BEHAVIOR & COMMUNICATION

Art is a tool that can be used to help autistic children with behavioral struggles as well as improve a child’s communication skills (Lee, Chou & Feng).

“We saw his ability to **stay focused** on something for a longer period of time. He was also **more interactive** about the things that he was drawing. It was something that we **could relate** to him about... [and] when people came over, it was something that they could **talk** about with him.”

— Cheryl, a mother

DISCUSSION

The literature review and case studies share several common trends that demonstrate the various positive effects of art on children with ASD. Five different subsections detail the main benefits of art covered in this study: expression and creativity, natural talent, confidence, behavior and communication, and improvement in conscious decision making. In each of the subsections, evidence from journals aligned with data from these interviews, and the two supported the tentative conclusion that art has positive effects on the behavior and communication of children with autism. In order to solidify this conclusion, more extensive research must be done.



It makes me feel like I’m **in my own world**, and so I think less about stress and stuff. It helps me get my mind out on a piece of paper, instead of just saying it out loud to people. **I feel confident.**

— 14-year-old student

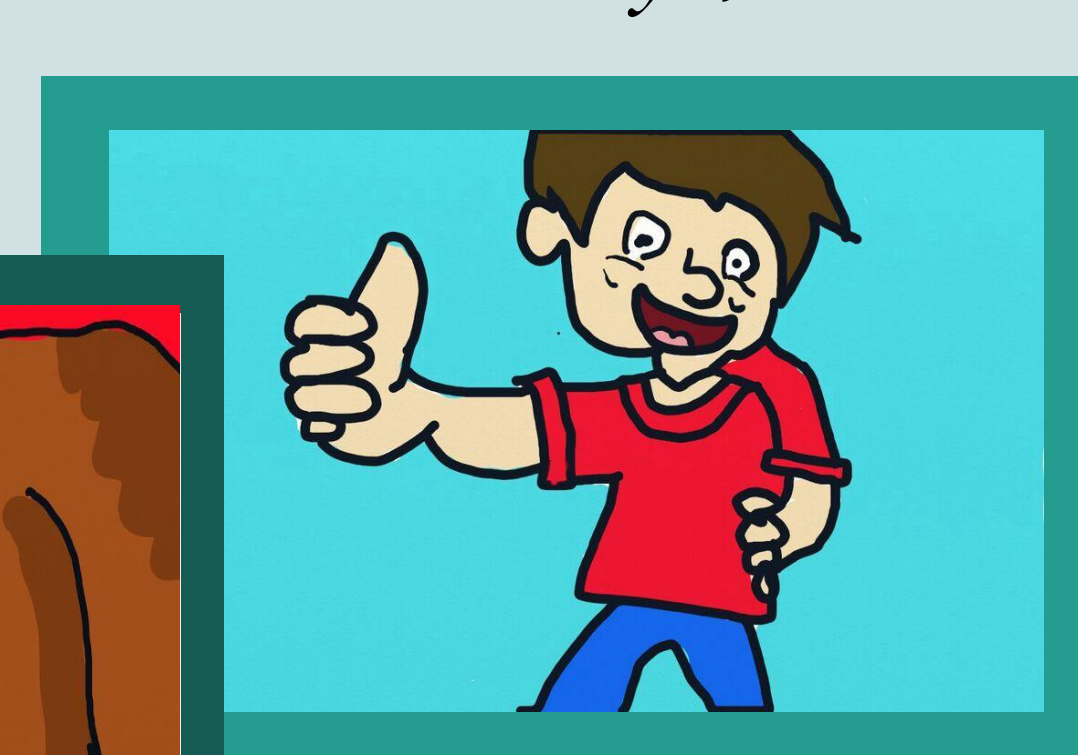
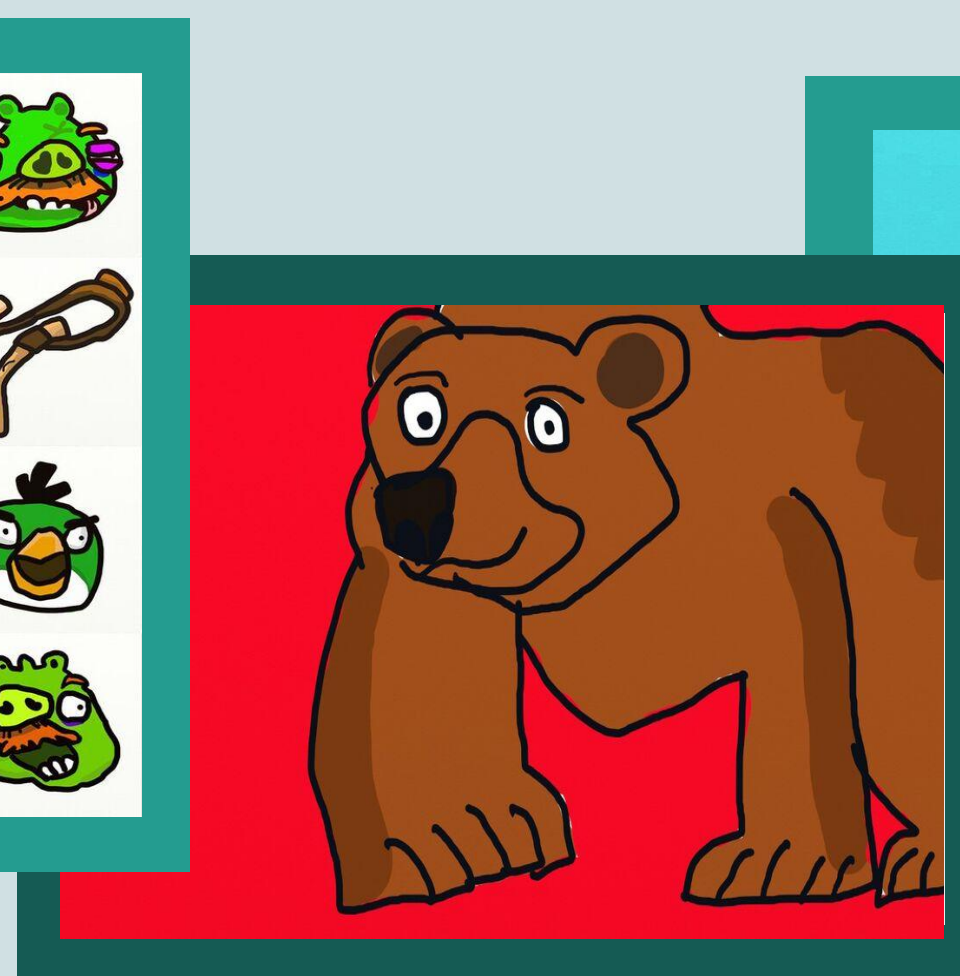


The artwork above was created by a 14-year-old boy with ASD.



There are times where he will draw about his **feelings** or draw pictures about things that he has seen or experienced. It’s just one of the many things that he does where he can escape and just **be himself**. He doesn’t have to focus [on] what is really going on.”

—Kristyn, a mother



The artwork above was created by a 10-year-old boy with ASD.



With autism, you are going through a lot of therapies, and you are trying to change the child; you are trying to improve all the skills, but the bottom line is that you are trying to fix things. This was something that we **didn’t have to ‘fix.’** It was like ‘wow he’s good at this.’ It was pretty huge for us in terms of **relating to him**.

— Cheryl, a mother

BIG PICTURE

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

- Embracing and encouraging the talents of children on the autistic spectrum can improve their sense of self-worth
- Creative outlets can serve as a method of expression for individuals who struggle with communication
- Art can be a viable career path for individuals with ASD
 - Cullen and Gavyn are considering going into field involving art
- Children with ASD should be encouraged to explore art at a young age
 - More art programs targeted towards children with ASD
 - A heavier emphasis on art in special education classrooms

NEXT STEP: Run our own art program!

SETTING

- Large room with desks
- Windows (benefits of sunlight)

MATERIALS

- Broad range of materials that are less messy

PARTICIPANTS

- 3-6 children per class
- 1:3 teacher-child ratio
- Parents welcome

SCHEDULE

Plan	Reason
30 minute free-draw	Giving children materials but no instruction causes them to have to ask for help and engage with the teacher → effective way to improve communication (Lee, Chou, Feng)
10 minute break	To ensure students remain focused during drawing time
10 minute instruction	Increase ability to stay focused, pay attention, absorb information, etc.
30 minute drawing time	A chance for the children to implement what they learned in the lesson, or continue with what they were working on
10 minute showcase and discussion	Communicating with teachers, parents and fellow students about artwork Praise → increase sense of self-worth Explaining artwork and artistic choices → increase in communication skills

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & REFERENCES

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