What is Art Therapy?

Art therapy is a form of expressive therapy that combines the process of art making with an individual’s verbal associations to improve and enhance physical, mental and emotional well-being. Art therapy uses the creative process to reconcile emotional conflicts and foster self-awareness. It is based on the belief that the creative process involved in artistic self-expression helps people to resolve conflicts and problems, develop interpersonal skills, manage behavior, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and self-awareness, achieve insight, and strengthen learning skills.

Art therapy integrates the fields of human development, the visual arts, and the creative process with models of counseling, education and psychotherapy. Art therapy is used with children, adolescents, adults, and families to assess and treat problems such as mental illness, substance abuse, family dysfunction and domestic violence, and trauma and loss. It is also a modality that is used to remediate physical, cognitive, and neurological problems and psychosocial difficulties related to medical illness.
Art therapy in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) began in 1979 as a pilot program under the direction of Ms. Janet Bush, Ed.S., ATR-BC. Due to the success of the program in improving students’ emotional functioning, the focus of art therapy in M-DCPS changed from serving a wide variety of special needs students to servicing students identified with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities (E/BD).

Presently, there are eighteen art therapists working in M-DCPS Division of Special Education (SPED). Art therapy is used as a therapeutic modality to help E/BD students access their education by providing them with the support they need to develop to their highest potential. Art therapists deliver weekly, individual and small group art therapy sessions and create individualized treatment plans that support the student’s education and provide the foundation for therapeutic goals. M-DCPS art therapists conduct formalized assessments, work as part of the educational team, meet with parents, and provide staff development and support. For more than thirty years, M-DCPS art therapists have employed art and the creative process as a healing modality to help those students who need to go beyond traditional means in order to access their education and ultimately become healthy, productive citizens.
Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) clinical art therapists hold a master's degree in art therapy from an accredited and approved university. All M-DCPS art therapists are required to maintain teacher certification in a related field from the State of Florida. They are encouraged to be members of both the American Art Therapy Association and the Florida Art Therapy Association. M-DCPS art therapists also maintain their national credentialing through the Art Therapy Credential’s Board where a majority of the department has reached the highest credentialing recognized by the profession - Board Certification.

M-DCPS art therapists are hired through the Division of Special Education. At present, eighteen art therapists provide services throughout the district. M-DCPS art therapists work with students identified with emotional/behavioral disabilities (E/BD) who have been assessed by an M-DCPS art therapist and have met the criteria for determination of need for clinical art therapy services. Service is provided in individual and small group sessions to students who need this alternative form of therapeutic intervention to access their education.

M-DCPS art therapists work as part of a treatment team to consult, assess, design and implement individualized treatment plans to help students reach their maximum potential.
Art Therapy in M-DCPS

- Assessment
- Intervention
- Department Support
- Research
- Consultation
- Professional Development

Clinical Art Therapist
Role of the M-DCPS School Art Therapist

The role of the M-DCPS clinical art therapist:

Assessment

- Individual art therapy assessments to identify student strengths and weaknesses, and ascertain problem areas that impact upon cognitive, psychological, social and academic functioning
- Individual art therapy reassessments at the close of the student’s IEP year to document growth and achievement of social, emotional and behavioral goals

Intervention

- Ongoing individual, dyad or group art therapy which addresses cognitive, emotional and social functioning
- In-service training, program planning and evaluation, parent education programs
- Collaborates with IEP team to determine Priority Education Needs (PEN), goals and benchmarks to be added to student’s IEP
- Collaborates on progress of goals and benchmarks on student’s IEP
- Documents art therapy treatment plans and student’s progress in therapy
- Maintains appropriate documentation and labeling of student’s artwork, including student’s name, medium, content, and date of creation
- Prepares written reports, as needed, for agencies and institutions (e.g., schools, courts, youth and family service agencies) and professionals involved in student’s treatment
- Maintains a file of appropriate consent and release forms for the use of student artwork/special activities
- Documents contact on Student Case Management Forms (SCMs).
- Files annual progress report in student’s cumulative folder
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### Consultation

- Consults with school personnel, parents, and outside personnel regarding student emotional, behavioral and educational concerns
- In-service training provided to school personnel, parents and the community

### Professional Development

- Participates in educational and therapeutic in-service workshops, conferences, symposiums and seminars
- Peer consultation and technical support regarding service delivery, clinical issues, program planning and development

### Research

- Involvement in all aspects of applied and basic research in the field of art therapy and special education
- Topics including art therapy assessment, projective techniques, creativity, learning problems, and cognitive functioning

### Program Planning, Development, Implementation, and Support Activities

- Participates on various committees, such as treatment planning, child study team, staff development, assessment, and public relations
Who is responsible for monitoring the M-DCPS Art Therapy Department?

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Who provides art therapy in M-DCPS?

This service is provided solely by credentialed art therapists (Registered Art Therapist, ATR and/or Board Certified Art Therapist, ATR-BC) by the Art Therapy Credentials Board. All art therapists are certified M-DCPS personnel with at least a master’s degree in the field of art therapy.

Why do art therapists hold certification in an educational area when they do not teach in M-DCPS?

In M-DCPS, art therapists need a teaching certificate in an educational field because there is presently no licensure for art therapy in the State of Florida. A teaching certificate is the acceptable credential until such time when the Florida Legislature approves art therapy licensure. Together with a teaching certificate in an educational area, an art therapist must have a master’s degree in the field of art therapy. The primary responsibility of M-DCPS art therapists is to provide individual and small group counseling for children with emotional disturbances. Art therapists do not teach subjects or classes of students.

Which students receive art therapy?

Art therapists provide intervention, prevention and remediation to students in E/BD programs.
How are the students selected for art therapy?

Selection for art therapy services begins as an IEP team decision, followed with an art therapy assessment and the art therapist then decides whether art therapy would truly be appropriate for the student. Before assessment, the following DCPS Criteria for Determination of Need is utilized by the art therapist to determine student needs; **a student must meet all the following criteria:**

1. A high interest in art media: the student has expressed an interest in art and gravitates towards art related activities; the student uses art as a form of communication.
2. A strong recommendation has been made by psychiatrists, psychologists or social workers for art therapy intervention and the student may have difficulty responding to traditional verbal therapy.

How are the students scheduled for art therapy?

- 60 minutes per assessment
- 30-45 minutes per individual session
- 45-60 minutes per group session

What school site support is needed to ensure a meaningful program?

To ensure a meaningful program, the following support is requested of schools:

- A separate room to maintain confidentiality and privacy in the individual and small group art therapy counseling sessions
- Locked storage for supplies and program documentation.

What is the art therapist’s role in developing a student’s IEP?

The art therapist is to be present, if possible, at each student’s IEP meeting and, as part of the IEP team, is to contribute to the development of goals and benchmarks to help meet the student’s educational and therapeutic needs.

How is technical support provided to assist the art therapist in delivering a meaningful therapeutic program?

SPED provides a department chairperson whose role is to perform on-site technical support. Periodic school visits are arranged with the site art therapist and school administrator.

What office has professional responsibility for the program?

SPED provides funding for personnel costs, materials and supplies for the program. SPED also has responsibility for conducting annual employee evaluations.
SELECTED WAYS THAT ART MAY BE USED THERAPEUTICALLY

In M-DCPS, therapeutic approaches for students are based on what the student needs at a given time in an effort to master individualized goals and benchmarks. Most often, the “art in therapy” approach is applied, as this is what makes art therapists uniquely qualified to assist in student growth.

Art in Therapy

Art in therapy is used as a vehicle for psychotherapy. Both the product and the associative references may be used in an effort to help individuals find more compatible relationships between their inner and outer worlds. This approach is provided by a certified/registered clinical art therapist. Art is used as a vehicle for communication for the purpose of developing insight, resolving emotional conflicts and symbolically understanding what is happening within an individual. It is art expression that lends itself to exploration and, as a result, to the adjustment of individuals to life. In this approach, the art therapist is more concerned with an individual’s inner experience and in assisting in making connections to help resolve their emotional conflicts. Process, form, content, and verbal associations become important for what each reflects about personality development, personality traits, and the unconscious. This approach is PROCESS-ORIENTED.

Art as Therapy

Art as therapy is concerned with art expression for academic, aesthetic, or cultural aims. This approach may be provided by individuals who are certified/registered art therapists, art educators, or artists who want to help individuals use art as an outlet for creative expression. This approach implies that producing artwork is an end in itself—that the creative process can be a means both of reconciling emotional conflicts and of fostering self-awareness and personal growth. There are often no personal/emotional connections encouraged in this approach. This approach is PRODUCT-ORIENTED.
Provision of Art Therapy Services in M-DCPS

- Uses art processes to facilitate expression and exploration of feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and other relevant clinical material
- Makes note of and draw inferences from student’s art product, affect, behavior, commentary, and interaction with group members (if any) during the art making process
- Uses verbal interactions, when appropriate, to promote mutual understanding of student’s art processes and products
- Reviews Treatment Plan/Progress Report and therapeutic goals with IEP team, as necessary, throughout the course of therapy
- Communicates regularly with other professionals involved in the student’s treatment
- Documents initial assessment, art therapy treatment plan, and student’s progress in therapy and maintains appropriate documentation and labeling of student’s artwork, including student’s name, medium, content, and date of creation
- Prepares written reports, as needed, for agencies and institutions (e.g., schools, courts, youth and family service agencies) and professionals involved in student’s treatment
- Maintains a file of appropriate consent and release forms for the use of student artwork/special activities
- Determines if the display of student artwork in sessions and public forums would be appropriate
- Provides consultation to other professionals on specific cases and art therapy processes
- Facilitates the termination process in ways appropriate to student needs or circumstances
- Documents student sessions, meetings, parent contact on Student Case Management Forms
- Files annual Treatment Plan/Progress Report without artwork in student’s cumulative folder.
- Obtains art equipment and materials necessary to maintain an inventory that allows flexibility of expression
- Adapts art materials and processes to the needs of specific populations
- Discusses ground rules for art therapy sessions (e.g., use of materials, behavior in the therapeutic environment) with student
Initial Art Therapy Procedures

Team Referral/Recommendation

Does Student meet **Criteria for Determination of Need**?

Complete Permission to Consent

Art Therapist Assesses Student

- SDT
- LECATA

*Art Therapist completes Assessment Write Up

If Art Therapist Finds Student to be Appropriate: Addition of Art Therapy Services

- FAPE
- IEP

Schedule Student for Art Therapy Session
The Art Therapy Department Logo was inspired by the nautical influence of the Miami Modern, or MiMo, movement which stylized our city’s architecture during the late 50’s and early 60’s. At the center of our logo is its heart - the “apple” heart. The “apple” heart represents the support and opportunity that art therapy provides in an educational setting. The “apple” heart contains its own inner heart, representative of the students we service. By providing our students with tools to help them make better choices and supporting them through the process of completing their inner heart, students learn to take an active role in accessing all aspects of their education.