

Growing Together: Cultivating the Social-Emotional Effects of Art Education through
Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

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Abstract

In many societies, the process of art is recognized as a healing and transformative practice. In recent years, it has been emerging in tandem with social emotional practices and procedures in American education. However, it is also a fact that social emotional learning (SEL) does not account for all students due to its inability to account for the needs of all students in the classroom. SEL alone aims to teach healthy development and emotional management skills, but fails to account for students with varying experiences. While there are those who can and do integrate the skills from the Social Emotional curriculum, students who do not can be labeled as troubled, which begins a vicious cycle of shame, isolation, and/or marginalization of certain groups of students.

SEL, for instance, is not trauma informed despite the prevalence of trauma in American society. It is entirely possible that a large number of children who are exposed to social emotional learning, are not able to reap the benefits of SEL due to institutional failures to account for their needs.

Assuming that all students will respond to the same approaches, is an assumption that erases the identities of marginalized children. This not only perpetuates a harmful cycle of systemic oppression, not just for the students, but for everyone. While art educators and educators in general are *not* therapists, I believe that we should have an understanding of how trauma works not only in the mind but through the ways trauma is ingrained in societal systems and institutions. While it is not necessary for educators to know every detail of a student's life, it is within our capability to be compassionate and supportive of the students who come into our

learning spaces. But in order to do this, we must have support from other staff and the institution itself. In this thesis, I will engage in a qualitative research project employing a narrative ethnography approach along with elements of emergent pedagogy to analyze effectiveness of my teaching in an art classroom, exploring what hinges on activating the social emotional experiences for students within art educational experiences. I will also demonstrate why incorporating trauma informed pedagogy into educational environments, for both the students and educators, deserves institutional support.

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INTRO

Trauma is neither a single incident nor is it a series of incidents. Rather, it is the subjective experiences of an individual who has experienced emotional or physical distress (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). In other words, trauma is what remains. It is a wound healed incorrectly or not at all. It lives inside of us, impeding our daily lives, social circles, school, and work environments. This growing emphasis on self-awareness has led a number of education systems to integrate Social Emotional Learning or SEL practices into their curriculums (Abrams, 2023). However, while educators can often identify obvious signs of trauma in students, responding to it with SEL is not always adequate. Not only may educators lack the necessary training to effectively address these issues for their students, but these practices are still not generalizable, especially for students with unhealed, traumatic wounds (Abrams, 2023).

Art is well-documented as being a source of emotional healing, allowing us to embrace vulnerability and to connect deeply with ourselves and others (Milan Art Institute, 2021). Because the arts are already so deeply rooted in healing, I believe that art educators are in a unique position to capitalize on the healing and unifying nature of this practice by integrating trauma-informed pedagogy and social-emotional practices in educational spaces. Art educators are uniquely positioned to promote healing art in educational spaces. However, it is essential to recognize that in order for this transformation to occur, the responsibility for facilitating this transformation lies with the institutions themselves.

My thesis project explores teaching from a place of compassion: how we, as art educators, can enhance the social-emotional influence of art education through trauma-informed practices. By doing this, we can consider not only the potential of art as a healing tool but the

effects of the societal structures and institution as a whole on our students as we restructure our learning spaces around the needs of our students. For this thesis project, I interview various SEL and trauma-informed art educators who are transforming their spaces (despite institutional barriers) in favor of the students. After research with Mini Makerz, a process based art program supported by Rhode Island School of Design and with Creature Conserve, an interdisciplinary art and science community, my project explores the intersection of trauma-informed pedagogy, social-emotional learning (SEL), and art education. Specifically, I research how art educators can enhance SEL in educational spaces so that these environments are also trauma-informed and why it is important that educators are supported in their attempts to bring these practices into learning environments.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this thesis, I hope to explore questions pertaining to both SEL and Trauma-Informed Pedagogy in an art space. My research analyzes such topics as: the link between educational spaces, art education, and childhood trauma and how we, as educators, can navigate challenges that arise when students experience trauma in and out of educational systems that perpetuate hierarchical and oppressive patterns. One question that shapes the framework of my thesis is how art educators can enhance the social-emotional and healing nature of their practice by incorporating a trauma-informed component as well.

This approach argues that, despite its high prevalence, the average educator is largely uninformed and unequipped about how to address student trauma despite it being an issue that is pervasive. But, as this issue is systemic in nature, this is not due to negligence of the educators but of the institutions themselves. However, as educators, we must actively empower ourselves to initiate the changes we wish to see within our educational environments by addressing and

dismantling the entrenched traumas embedded not only within our individual selves but within the system itself.

I believe that enhancing art education spaces with SEL and trauma-informed perspectives would support the emotional well-being of students and educators. I have noticed transformative effects of art and vulnerability in my own work with children in years past and how it can lead to cooperation, healthy communication, gratitude, and embracing imperfection. I have seen how healing it can be when someone understands that their voice, their stories, and their art are inherently precious and hold intrinsic worth.

Shame whispers that we have no value. It plays an active role in retraumatizing us, and unfortunately, it runs rampant in educational spaces where Western culture especially has prioritized and placed value on certain identities, cultures, values, and ways of learning, while shaming and erasing others (Proctor et al., 2020) & (Gonzalez. C personal communication, 2024). By restructuring our spaces we can begin dismantling the narrative of shame etched into us by a society with intersecting systems of oppression.

One way of addressing this issue is considering how educational systems weaponize shame which exists tangential to trauma, worsening the effects of it.

In this paper I investigate:

1. What role does art education play in promoting healing, cooperation, healthy communication, gratitude, and embracing imperfection?
2. How can art educators enhance the social-emotional and healing nature of their practice by incorporating trauma-informed components?

3. How can educators navigate challenges arising from student trauma within educational systems that perpetuate hierarchical and oppressive patterns?
4. How can educational spaces be transformed from places of oppression that retraumatize students into spaces of healing that empower them to be their best selves?

LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purposes of my research, I believe that it is crucial to differentiate the terms "Social Emotional Learning" and "Trauma Informed Pedagogy". The former emphasizes the process by which individuals learn to adopt and maintain healthy relationships with the self and others. This can involve acquiring coping skills, shifting one's attitudes, learning how to achieve personal goals, and by coming to understand how to make responsible decisions (Abrams, 2023). Trauma-informed pedagogy, on the other hand, refers to the ability to recognize that individuals may have adverse life experiences that influence their behavior (Pawlo et al., 2019).

The failure of social emotional learning to address the needs of every student highlights where the practice is lacking. While it aims to point students towards success, it ignores one crucial factor: every student comes into the classroom with their own way of understanding and interacting with the world around them.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Child trauma occurs more than you think. More than two-thirds of children reported at least 1 traumatic event by age 16." (SAMHSA, n.d.). Put differently, 67% American children before the age of 16 have endured experiences such as abuse and/or assault, exploitation, witnessing or experiencing violence, natural disasters, loss of a loved one, war experiences, military family related stress, neglect, serious accidents, life-threatening illnesses, and others (SAMHSA, n.d.).

In other words, SEL is too holistic a measure on its own, as not all students enter the classroom with the same experiences or advantages.

No matter how motivated or persistent the SEL curriculum, children will all reap different results. Studies have shown, for instance, that social emotional learning is ineffective for black who are met with the “blatant or implicit negative expectations” of white teachers who disproportionately dole out “school based injustices” against this marginalized group due to (Ford, D. (2020).

This is because of racial trauma, for instance, which is not noted on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s list. This is not only humiliating but also frightening and isolating experience or set of experiences (MediLexicon International, n.d.). Without a sense of community, isolated and ashamed of their identity, human beings, especially children, struggle to cope, impacting their relationships, school, work, and their ability to feel safe (MediLexicon International, n.d.).

For instance, a student can have one or multiple marginalized identities, based on race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability, etc (Proctor et al., 2020). While as educators, it is not our responsibility to heal or take on student-trauma, we must aim to understand the interconnected nature of our student’s identities and our own positionality how (Proctor et al., 2020). While it is necessary for students to learn conflict management skills and accountability, they are also children with developing minds who have a need to feel safe, supported, and seen. Because trauma is so prevalent, we educators can do our best to understand trauma and the various ways that it can manifest in students. Furthermore, art educators can use this as a vehicle in their classroom to emphasize a safe, supportive, and meditative environment

Many students with trauma come into school with shame already embedded into their psyche and therefore, the school environment, for a number of reasons, can retraumatize students (Dolezal & Gibson, 2022). Trauma can lead to chronic shame, leading individuals to view themselves as deeply flawed, worthless, and/or unlovable, especially those who are still establishing an identity (i.e., children). This, in turn, can impact a student's performance in school (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021).

The idea of "shame sensitivity" (Dolezal & Gibson, 2022), or an individual experiencing shame when they are not guilty of wrongdoing is highly relevant in discussions about eliminating shame in the classroom, especially when there may be students who may be in a perpetual state of stress due to trauma they have experienced and still experience due to their sensitivity to shame. Below is a list of fight, flight, freeze, or fawn "stress response" behaviors or how students might react to situations they deem threatening in the classroom (see Figure 1.2). In many instances, it is possible that these behaviors (some more common than others) can be triggered by shame, fear, anxiety, and other forms of stress (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021).

Fight	Flight	Freeze	Fawn
Aggression	Walking/running out of class	Blank stares	Perfectionism
Arguing	Ignoring	Disassociation	Over-preparing
Threats	Head down, hoodie up!	Numb (shrug)	Overly helpful
Silliness	Cutting class	Head on desk	Befriends bullies
Defiance	Leaving school	Refusal to answer questions or follow commands	Submits to pressure easily
Yelling	Hovering	Appears forgetful	Lacks boundaries
Hitting/biting/spitting	Purposely getting kicked out	Inability to move	Exaggerated people pleasing
Cursing/vulgar language	Withdrawing	Exhibiting numbness	
Sudden outbursts	Daydreaming	Inability to recognize familiar faces	
Posturing	Seeming to sleep	Avoids tasks	
Pacing	Headphones or earbuds		
Provoking adults	Mindless cell phone surfing		
Throwing objects	Hiding under desks, tables		
Talking back			
Slamming doors or lockers			
Hands in fists			
Refusal to sit at desk			

Source: Adapted from Caplan (2015, slide 6)

Figure 1.2 Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn, “Stress Response” behaviors in school
(Brummer, & Thorsborne, 2021, p. 50).

Developing a Compassionate Lens

How do we, as educators, reach our students and overcome these challenges? What can we do when students have harmful ways of coping or are triggered by shame-based stress?

Considering that discrimination as a trauma causes a soul-deep harm which exacerbates shame, compassion allows us to see human behavior through a lens of understanding. Glasser (2020) suggests that we are driven by basic needs such as survival, fun, love and belonging, freedom, and a sense of power in oneself; everyone is simply doing what they can to meet their needs, and everyone, especially children, who have not yet developed their emotionally or perhaps learned healthy coping mechanism, can learn a better way to meet their needs. Lastly, the researcher of this philosophy advocates for choice, a key component of trauma-informed pedagogy. He says that a person should always be allowed choice, even in a setting of limited freedom (Glasser, 2020).

Dolezal and Gibson (2022) recommend taking seriously the need for connection, love, and belonging when connecting with students, (whether they have known trauma or not) and addressing their needs with compassion and connection. After all, trauma responses are the body's way of shifting into survival mode. This is a human need for survival. As demonstrated in Figure 1.3, Basic Human Needs (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021, p. 35). By viewing challenging behavior from a compassionate, trauma-informed lens, we can recognize that this may stem from unmet needs. Understanding a child before passing judgment and meeting them where they are is vital for building trust (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021).

Survival	Fun	Love and belonging	Freedom	Power
Food	Play	Connection	Autonomy	Influence
Health	Entertainment	Trust/Honesty	Independence	Achievement
Shelter	Excitement	Empathy	Individuality	Recognition
Warmth	Laughter	Appreciation	Self-empowerment	Competence
Water	Passion	Community	Solitude	Efficiency
Safety	Enjoyment	Family	Choice	Value
Security	Learning	Friendship		
Protection	Growth	Respect		
Rest	Mastery	Affection		
Air	Teaching	Purpose		
		Meaning		

Figure 1.3 Basic Human Needs (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021, p. 35).

Using compassion instead of judgment and shame is one way to deescalate a situation and can allow you as an educator to strengthen your relationship between educator and student. For instance, exhibiting personal concern for the student rather than highlighting a choice that a child has made can shift a situation from “reactive mode” into “non judgemental investigative mode” (Boryga, A., 2022).

While being compassionate, curious, vulnerable rather than shame-wielding and judgmental is crucial for educators in order to connect with, uplift, and empower students, I also believe that we are at a time now that educators would benefit from a basic understanding of "The Window of Tolerance," developed by Dr. Dan Siegel, MD. It refers to an individual's ability to regulate their nervous system, which can shrink with trauma and stress. Having an understanding of someone's window of tolerance can paint a picture of the skills and strategies that they need to promote this regulation (Gill, 2017).

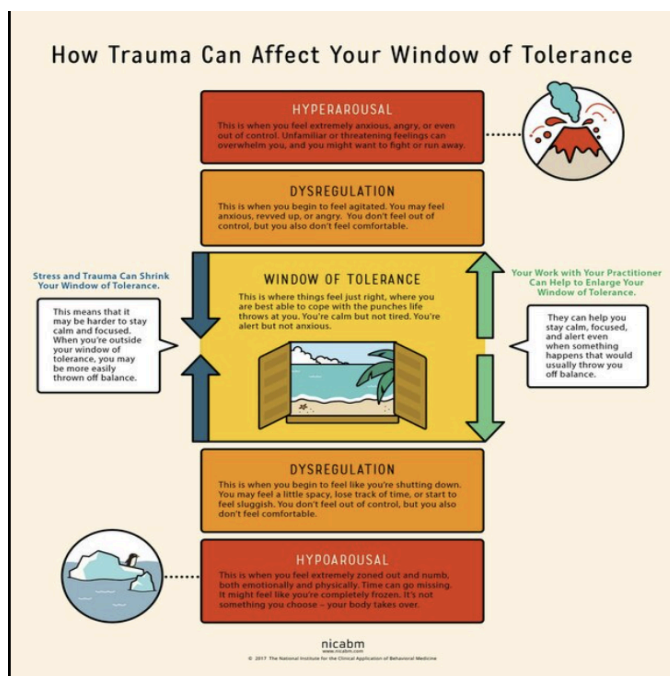


Figure 1.4 The Window of Tolerance (NICABM, 2017)

Both charts (figures 1.3 & 1.4) serve as helpful visual representations to validate emotional highs and lows while also providing educators with a guide about how to interact with students who are edging into dysregulated states.

Addressing Trauma and Stress in Education: Strategies for Educators

Again, the Window of Tolerance is one of many helpful models that educators can reference in order to understand how to react and respond to children who are displaying behavioral challenges from a lens of compassion. We can understand that perhaps a student exhibiting certain behavioral challenges is, in fact, shifting into a survival state, exacerbated by trauma or stress, rather than inherently being a person that is petty or malicious. As educators, we can take a compassionate response that utilizes multiple perspectives by analyzing models such as these and guide our students to adopt better ways of coping.

For instance, by studying the Window of Tolerance, educators can contemplate:

What does the child need to remain with their window of tolerance while utilizing social engagement with others and feeling safe?

Which people does the child feel most safe with?"

Which situations do the child's protective responses emerge?

Where are they right now within their window of tolerance and how do I know?

Where am I within my window of tolerance and how do I know? What do I need to remain within my window of tolerance?

(Ayre, & Krishnamoorthy, 2020)

Ayre & Krishnamoorthy(2020) suggest that educators use visual examples like the Window of Tolerance for the students so that they can easily visualize and communicate where they are emotionally. An educator can display one on the white board or perhaps even have small laminated copies taped to student desks or tables (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy, 2020). Additionally, check ins during the class time could be a helpful way to gauge which zone an individual or a group is in throughout the day (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy,2020).

Managing Escalation and Hyperarousal

With students who frequently travel outside of their window of tolerance, Ayre & Krishnamoorthy (2020) can be experiencing hyperarousal, or an overstimulation of the body's nervous system. This can be common with those dealing with trauma. The symptoms of this state are highly elevated and a child may appear anxious or overwhelmed, irritable and angry, or engage in fight or flee behaviors. As educators, we can help make the school safe for them so

they do not need to rely on these responses (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy, 2020). These authors suggest phrasing questions such as:

“Where do you feel the safest?”

“Is there any way we can help you bring some of that place with you to school?”

Is there anyone you wish you could bring with you to school to help feel okay? (this might be from family or a friend or might be a music or sport hero etc.)

How might we help you bring something of this person with you to school?”

(Ayre & Krishnamoorthy 2020).

The researchers assert that “the more a young person feels safe at school the less likely it is they will exceed their window of tolerance” and that offering students opportunities to increase their sense of control and power are beneficial for students who continuously find themselves in the hyperarousal zone (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy, 2020).

Within an art education context, art educators could offer a sense of control by way of more kinesthetic activities. This could look like finger painting, clay, collages, body tracing, etc.

One source discovered that

“Working physically with art materials can have a positive effect on the hyperarousal symptoms of PTSD...in child trauma survivors, it was found that by becoming aware of different parts of the body moving during the manipulation of art materials (known as kinesthetic activity), released tension, facilitated relaxation and increased ability to tolerate stress (The Palmeira Practice, 2019)”.

Lastly, for children who frequently find themselves with highly elevated behaviors, educators can work with the school, available support staff, and also the students themselves, to enact a plan for deescalation. This source emphasizes that the children themselves should be

included in this planning process so that they may have an understanding of the plan of action (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy, 2020.). Educators can acknowledge the child's calm responses and the importance of those responses for maintaining a safe environment.

For a child who has already entered the hyperarousal zone, is emotionally dysregulated, educators must first establish safety, maintain self-regulation by remaining calm themselves, work toward calming the child without shaming them and allowing them to talk through what happened. Additionally, consequences that follow should be logical and clear to the child. They should help the child to take responsibility and encourage them to reflect on the event and why certain consequences have arisen. Furthermore, asking a child what they need and helping them reintegrate into the group to reduce isolation and shame is necessary, as is speaking to other children who may need attention after an incident. Lastly, reviewing a plan of action with staff members and the child's caretaker to work on areas of improvement is beneficial (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy 2020)

Managing Hypoarousal and Dissociation

Children whose nervous system shuts down when they lose a sense of safety are said to fall below their window of tolerance, or hypoarousal (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy, 2020). A child may slip into freeze or fawn behaviors, resulting in fluctuating attention, a lack of comprehension, withdrawing from communication or external, or even minor to severe dissociative states (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy, 2020). It is important for educators to remember that this behavior, when it occurs, is due to high-level emotions such as fear, shame, helplessness, fear, loss, confusion, and others, rather than manipulation, a lack of intelligence, or laziness. (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy, 2020).

The author suggests incorporating kinaesthetic learning opportunities that

have a sensory element to them i.e. activities that stimulate many of the senses or even creating a space in the room for a sensory break area in the room (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy 2020). In more extreme cases of dissociation, the researcher posits, allowing the child to quietly go to a ‘designated safe space’ within the classroom. In an art education classroom, this could be a drawing or sensory material corner.

Additionally, the educator can allow the child to visit a counselor, create a climate with predictable routine, and do their best to eliminate triggers, such as unexpected touch and loud noises (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy 2020)

These are techniques that Ayre & Krishnamoorthy (2020) recommends for educators to notice and respond to potentially trauma-influenced behavior in the classroom. Not every educator is prepared to go into teaching with even the most basic knowledge or language surrounding the topic of recognizing and de-escalating dysregulated states. I believe it prudent for organizations to account for this need during teacher training and to have staff who are trained in these techniques on-call.

Dismantling Harmful Environments

There are six guiding principles to trauma-informed care: “safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment, voice and choice, and cultural, historical and gender issues” (Vandillen, 2020). There are also “Four R’s”: Realization about trauma and how it can affect people and groups, recognizing the signs of trauma, having a system which can respond to trauma, and resisting re-traumatization” (Vandillen, 2020). School communities that authentically and compassionately engage in

these programs can assist in fostering a climate where students feel safe and confident in their ability to learn. (Vandillen, 2020).

As educators, our modus operandi should also be to create spaces where students can take risks without fear of being met with humiliation, shame, or judgment (Creekmore, & Creekmore, (2022). In general for educators to create a more trauma informed, social emotional classroom, Pawlo et al., 2019 suggests that teachers incorporate trusting, supportive relationships with the students .

It is compassionate and humane to recognize the systems that are in place as harmful and endeavor to dismantle them, particularly in those that reinforce power imbalances (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021). We can challenge and interrogate the systemic discrimination that diverse student populations face by being aware of the harm that is occurring, refusing to participate, and making changes by protecting the vulnerable students in our classrooms (Proctor, et al., 2020). Using positive reinforcement rather than punitive discipline and minimizing stress in children's lives can prevent further behavioral challenges which might occur as a result of a shame that is likely embedded deep within their identities (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021). Conscious discipline, for instance, is about incorporating common, trauma-informed language, and having an understanding about how to deescalate an emotionally dysregulated child rather than enacting a punitive disciplinary tactic to correct the behavior. It is also about knowing how to incorporate social, emotional, physical, cultural, and cognitive, learning domains into one curriculum (Bailey, n.d.). It emphasizes skills such as anger management, helpfulness, assertiveness, cooperation, empathy, and problem solving (Bailey, n.d.).

Only an environment with high expectations coupled with high support can promote empathy, connection, and accountability within students. Instead of overly controlling and/or

neglectful behavior on behalf of the educator, it is recommended that problems are solved collaboratively through a compassionate approach (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021). This, the authors say, is a way to ensure that students feel respected and honored in a class setting.

On a similar vein, Brummer & Thorsborne (2021) recommends involving the Observations, Feelings, Needs, and Requests (OFNR) or, remaining non-judgemental of a student's needs and feelings by reframing, shifting away from blame, and using affective statements, and focuses on gratitude rather than praise (p. 105). This ensures that students do not tie their sense of achievement to their self worth, but rather they build intrinsic motivation and a sense of self efficacy. In other words, the goal is that children learn that it is well within themselves to want to learn and strive for success-whatever this looks like for them.

Brown (2011) describes shame in relation to self worth. Like two poles on a spectrum, the two exist as opposites. One can cross the threshold, emerging from a place of shame and isolation by engaging vulnerability with one another, by joining with community, and by reclaiming personal identity, in order to overcome feelings of unworthiness (Brown, 2011). It seems to me that Brown is implying that by striving to know ourselves fully and deeply and by engaging with the people around us in meaningful ways, that we can begin to heal the shame that separates us from healing and growth.

In an art education space specifically, Willcox (2017), discusses how vulnerability and connection through art are just a few of the criteria to achieve a “psychologically safe” art environment (p. 11). Willcox (2017) writes about a “psychological safe” art education classroom (p.11) .The criterion for creating this environment is encouraging students to embrace vulnerability via discussions, exploring, taking creative risks, and failing and succeeding without judgment from the teacher. Willcox, inspired by the language of Brown (2011), analyzes how an

educator uses personal art journals to incorporate what she calls a “psychologically safe” space (p. 11). She implemented this project in order to assess vulnerability, eventually concluding that creative risk taking creates a vulnerable space for the students and the teacher (Willcox, 2017). According to the National Coalition for Core Art Standards, if a visual art lesson is designed to empower a student to create, respond, present, in some way, it increases the likelihood of the art-maker creating connections (Willcox, 2017). In other words, as long as a student is genuinely participating in the art, they are reaping the emotional benefits.

In the podcast, *How God Works*, Dave DeSteno interviews scientists, spiritual leaders, and religious figures of all faiths and those with secular proclivities, in order to discuss ancient practices and belief systems and how they interact with the modern world. The goal of this episode was to interpret how ancient traditions can be adapted and used in our lives in order to find joy, meaning and connection (DeSteno 2021).

DeSteno interviewed the co-founder of Sacred Design Lab, Casper ter Kuile who spoke in detail about the Sacred Design Lab. In doing my own research on the Sacred Design Lab, I observed that their organization overlaps with philosophies of Brene Brown and bell hooks. They write that everyone carries gifts that the world needs and that we all are capable of deepening meaning and connection within our lives. However, we face preventing us from accessing our inner gifts and sharing them in community with one another (Sacred Design Lab, 2023). The emphasis on this statement seems particularly relevant. Finding genuine meaning and building a trusting community have established what it means to dismantle toxic hierarchies and introduce a pedagogy that is compassionate and trauma informed. This philosophy revolves around love and belonging and similarly “dismantling systems of domination” and “interlocking systems of oppression and prevent us from living in [the] world” (Sacred Design Lab 2023).

In the podcast, DeSteno and ter Kuile discuss the importance of rituals, or moments of awareness and reflection that are essential to one's day.

Rituals are not just habits: rather, they exist to center us, relax our minds and bring us to the present moment. Whether one participates in “rituals” as part of a faith or for secular reasons, they connect us with others, or even, quite literally, heal us. Rituals, especially when done in a group, can alleviate anxiety and depression, hope, optimism, and improve our relationships (DeSteno 2021). Belonging changes our social behavior. It stimulates loyalty, compassion, and joy, and diminishes burdensome emotions like anxiety, loneliness, and fear (Sacred Design Lab 2023)”. According to researchers who have studied the long term physical and emotional health of this trend, it works a little like a “dose response effect”, DeSteno reports. “You need to do it regularly and frequently in order to see results!” This can look like routinely sharing a meal routinely, sharing a silence or a prayer, dancing or singing as a group, routinely expressing gratitude, or sharing a moment of vulnerability (DeSteno 2021).

As art educators, We can ask our students what rituals or routines they would like to incorporate into the art class at the beginning of their time in the space that would make them feel welcomed and safe during their time. Some ritual examples might include morning mindfulness art, gratitude sketches, collaborative art exercises, or a project where they reflect on their strengths.

When listening to this, I considered art-making as a ritual. I was reminded of the words of an art educator, Danielle Singh, who commented that “art is the SEL” (Singh, personal communication, 2024). In other words. If the art has meaning for the children, that it, in itself, becomes Social Emotional Learning that leads to the development of their emotional

well-being. If then, we incorporate elements such as building an atmosphere of trust, allowing moments for collaboration and vulnerability, diverse and inclusive learning opportunities, etc, are we not also incorporating, becoming trauma informed ourselves to help bridge that gap, are we not also incorporating many of the principles of trauma informed care? (i.e. Six Guiding Principles, “safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment, voice and choice, and cultural, historical and gender issues” & the “Four R’s”: Realization about trauma and how it can affect people and groups, recognizing the signs of trauma, having a system which can respond to trauma, and resisting re-traumatization” (Vandillen, 2020). Authentically engaging with trauma-informed care and incorporating into art programs and into education settings itself can foster a climate where students feel safe and confident in their ability to learn (Vandillen, 2020).

Using similar language, the Sacred Design Lab (2023) muses about what it would take to “create a rhythm of life in which we have space in our days to feel fully big and fully small? To design products, programs, and experiences that meet the soul’s needs, our means must themselves be soul-centered.”(Sacred Design Lab (2023). I take this to mean that if we are to truly bloom, we must first have the opportunity to know ourselves along the way. We can only thrive in a space where we are guided and nurtured, yet also free to stretch and grow into our own meaning. We must feel safe enough to put down roots and to weave ourselves into the surrounding community.

As previously mentioned, trauma lives inside of us, takes many shapes, and has the potential to manifest in a variety of ways, whether we are aware of its presence or not. It impacts the way we navigate in social, school, and work environments and unfortunately, many of these environments are not accessible for individuals with emotional difficulties stemming

from trauma. In a school setting, this reality has the potential to affect both students and educators, due to the harmful policies and practices that exist to police and oppress the students (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021). “Compassion fatigue” can occur when educators encounter their own emotional difficulties within such an environment, where we are regularly caring for the distress of others, teachers and others (Reeves, 2019). Reeves (2019) discusses the impact of student trauma on teachers who employ an active listening and empathetic model, demonstrating the importance of a proper outlet. In her classroom, she prioritized de-escalation, communication skills, self-reflection, emotional regulation, and rather than punitive policies, she used understanding and empathy to resolve conflicts (Reeves, 2019). As an outlet, the teacher employed lessons where she and her students explored meaning, feelings, and the communication of big ideas, through participant-voiced poetry, researcher-voiced poetry, and social fiction stories to encourage vulnerability and self reflection (Reeves, 2019). However, the researcher also acknowledged that while the art educator is capable of transforming a classroom into one of healing, the onus lies with the institution itself in supporting the educators. The researcher calls for trauma related work in schools, such as an intentional effort of the institutions to support the educators through preparation programs, trained counselors within the school, additional art educators to prevent burnout, or even teacher wellness programs like “de-stressing collaboratively in afterschool yoga or Pilates” (Reeves, 2019, p. 14). As stated by the researcher, what is necessary for an institution to support its most vulnerable population is “an underlying structure that values relationships and mental health, support, resources, and time to take care of students and teachers” (Reeves, 2019, p. 6) as our culture begins shifting into one that has a greater understanding of trauma and mental health.

Additionally, art educators can utilize tools like mindfulness and art education and create

programs and lesson plans based on how they intersect. Studies have shown that when we regularly participate in formal mindfulness activities, or intentionally appreciating the present, increases self awareness. This may look like showing a genuine interest in student artwork, planning lessons surrounding reconstruction and deconstruction art, or encouraging “happy accidents” in art (Dunn-Snow & D’Amelio 2000., p.49), “informal mindfulness” moments (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021, p. 91), begin to happen naturally. Informal mindfulness moments include vulnerability, empathetic listening, and being attuned to others and ourselves. When we begin to adopt a mindful outlook, we can also experience self compassion, emotional regulation, and a non-judgemental acceptance of the present moment which can lead to a reduction in shame. In art, it can also look like the expressive therapies continuum and having students engaging in fluid versus resistive media, simple versus complex media, and structured versus unstructured in order to encourage emotional experiences (Dunn-Snow & D’Amelio 2000). Fluid media, such as watercolor paints, soft clay, or pastels, are free-flowing and expressive, allowing for release, while resistive media, such as clay or collage materials, are more tactile and physically engaging (ETC Assessment, 2017). These media are therefore more grounding. Simple media, such as drawing with pencil or markers are examples of simple media. This provides a means of expression that is straightforward for those who are overwhelmed by complex materials or feelings (ETC Assessment, 2017). They can be used to visually communicate complex emotions as well. Meanwhile, using complex media such as collage or mixed media unlocks a multimodal experience for individuals to explore more nuanced types of expression (ETC Assessment, 2017). Lastly, structured activities as opposed to unstructured activities are clear and guided, offering a greater sense of direction. Unstructured activities offer more freedom such as projects that involve more intuitive prompts (ETC Assessment, 2017).

Kinaesthetic learning opportunities, as highlighted earlier in Ayre, & Krishnamoorthy (2020), stood out to me as especially relevant to an art education setting. When viewed as a multimodal experience, (such as in a Reggio Emilia philosophy), art education encourages children to incorporate a variety of expressions and mediums like viewing sculpture, drawing and mark making, and painting (Aden & Theodotou 2019). The sensory nature of these experiences are beneficial for those who have experienced trauma (The Palmeira Practice, 2019), which, as we know, is highly prevalent and overlooked in children. One child with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder who engaged in kinesthetic art activities found the physical and tactile sensations of clay to help release tension, promote relaxation, and increase her ability to tolerate anxiety. Not only that, using this material specifically allowed her a safe space to symbolically represent her experiences and emotions (The Palmeira Practice, 2019). Drawing and painting on the other hand allowed her to visually confront her emotions and inner experiences. It also enabled her to communicate her ideas and observations aloud, as well as visually imagine a desire to recover (The Palmeira Practice, 2019).

A multimodal approach to mindfulness urges educators to build trust and establish connection through active listening. Listening is a core component of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, a model that urges educators to practice the wisdom of listening and truly engaging: in order to establish rich and meaningful connection with students. True listening connects us with others, making us sensitive to their needs and means of communication (Rinaldi 2001).. Though the language is different, this to me, is inherently trauma informed, as it is founded on support and centering the student in all of their endeavors. The Spiral Movement is another term that Rinaldi (2001) introduces to emphasize the idea that educators can use observation, documentation, and interpretation as highly substantial forms

of listening. Doing so can powerfully influence a student's sense of connection in a classroom space (Rinaldi 2001). In an art-setting especially, suggests that documentation of a child's art be nonjudgmental and organized in order to track the children's thought process, perspectives, and growth (Aden & Theodotou 2019). This powerful form of vulnerability creates a safe environment, as it encourages students to express their ideas without judgment (Rinaldi 2001). Through active listening, the listener should be fully receptive to the speaker and their way of communicating. They should be paying attention, not only to the words being spoken, but to the emotions and meaning underneath the language. Listening is understanding the speaker's story and their experiences to truly comprehend what the other person needs (Rinaldi 2001).

Multimodal learning, a key component of the Reggio Emilia approach, centers the students and prioritizes their unique forms of expression (Aden & Theodotou,2019). By allowing them to choose their own modes of communication, student interest not only emerges but the children are also empowered (Aden & Theodotou, 2019). As mentioned previously, not only is freedom listed as crucial in the choice theory's Basic Human Needs of Survival (Dolezal and Gibson 2022), but offering a student a sense of control can aid with emotional regulation (Ayre,& Krishnamoorthy, 2020). Like other resources in this article, this reading reflects the notion that children learn best when they are supported by compassionate educators and offered the freedom to express themselves in many different ways.

METHODOLOGY

This thesis engages in a qualitative research project employing a narrative ethnography approach along with elements of emergent pedagogy to analyze the effectiveness of incorporating trauma informed elements of a three week art educational classroom, based on this idea that art is already social emotional learning therein of itself.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) qualitative research is “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible.” (p.3). It stresses “how social experience is created and given meaning” (=p.8). Narrative inquiry allows participants to provide the researcher with their life experiences through rich stories (Proctor, et. al, 2020) while emergent pedagogy is a philosophy of teaching that is adaptive and responsive to the particular students in a class and the shifting social, cultural, and political context (Proctor, et, al, 2020). Narrative inquiry emerges in my initial interviews with trauma informed individuals and my attempts to build trusting relationships with the students and in my class in order to hold space with the students and their ideas. Emergent pedagogy surfaced with lesson planning, being flexible as the need arose. For example, a large part of emergent pedagogy included employing specific curriculum changes or teaching style in order to respond to student needs or to account for technical issues, as this was an unfamiliar classroom for Jocelyn and I. Furthermore, as noted for the purposes of my thesis project, I was intentional about establishing a clear and consistent environment and addressing student behavior with positive reinforcement, conscious discipline, and in one instance, trauma informed intervention to help an distressed child.

When engaging in this project, I always keep in mind questions like: when does art become healing? And follow up that musing with: art always has the potential to lead to social emotional learning, but only when the curriculum itself is trauma informed. Even though I am not classically trained in trauma informed education (though one day I hope to be), I drew inspiration from various case studies and interviews. Candy Gonzalez, a trauma informed art educator from Philadelphia and Danielle Singh, a Trauma competent art educator in the North Kingstown school district, were the most influential for my thesis.

I employed a qualitative research project that uses a narrative ethnography approach along with elements of emergent pedagogy to make my own teaching/make the space trauma informed. Hopefully, with this thesis, I can show the necessity of trauma informed education in art education settings.

DATA

Case Studies & Interviews Data

Before I began my own foray into an art education classroom, I wanted to get the insight of art educators who have experience not only in the arts, but in social emotional and/or trauma informed learning. I hoped to learn their perspectives and opinions on incorporating social emotional learning as well as trauma informed pedagogy into art education classrooms, given that SEL is not trauma informed. I connected to these individuals, either finding them on my own or connecting via my professors in order to acquire information for my thesis.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

I was interested in researching the Social Emotional Learning program of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, its implementation, outcomes, and its alignment with Rhode Island School of The Department of Teaching + Learning in Art + Design's educational philosophy. I came across this particular program after searching extensively for art organizations that heralded programs that supported SEL acquisition in children.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is a cultural institution situated in New York City. For over 150 years, the Met has been collecting, studying, conserving, and presenting significant works of art to a diverse audience, introducing people to cultures, dissimilar to their own, weaving together different time periods and histories (The Met, n.d.). For the Social and Emotional Learning Through Art: Lessons for the Classroom initiative, The Met's Education Department engaged in a collaborative effort with 75 school districts, with a particular focus on addressing the needs of students in (D75) schools during the COVID-19 pandemic (Holderand et al. 2022). In other words, they served individuals with disabilities who bore a disproportionate burden of the pandemic's health and socioeconomic effects (Holderand et al. 2022). The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met), recognized the unique struggles faced by adolescents, especially those with pre-existing mental health difficulties and disabilities. They embarked on an initiative to integrate Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into an art education curriculum for 75 New York D75 Public Schools.

After further research, I reached out via email requesting to connect with an individual who was familiar with the project. Luckily, I was able to speak with two MET-staff members within the art education department, Christina and Kirsten, who were very knowledgeable about the organization and the program.

This involved an in-depth exploration of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's program, Social and Emotional Learning Through Art: Lessons for the Classroom initiative. In my case study, I delved into the program's development, implementation, outcomes, and its alignment with Rhode Island School of Design's Teaching Learning and Design's educational philosophies.

Danielle Singh: Quidnessett Elementary School

I was also fortunate to be able to connect with Danielle Singh, a Trauma competent art educator in the North Kingstown school district. My professor put me in contact with Danielle Singh via email, mentioning that I am within the MA program and her thesis is focused on social emotional learning and trauma informed practices in art education. We communicated over email and eventually, I requested to speak with her over the phone and gather information about her profession. Later, in the spring, I reached out again and had the opportunity to meet Danielle in person when I visited her classroom and received a tour of her school.

Candy Gonzales: Trauma Competent Art Educator

A professor put me in contact with Candy Gonzalez and I was fortunate to connect with them, first over email, then over google meet, and then over a class-wide chat. Our meetings took place in the Spring of 2024 and I learned pertinent information that I was able to carry into our next discussion which happened a month later. While they spoke to our whole class over zoom as a visitor, talking about their work as a trauma informed art educator, we were able to ask questions which I have used to expand on my own knowledge as a teaching artist as I prepared to create a trauma informed environment for my students.

With guidance from the Metropolitan educators, and trauma educators, Danielle, and Candy, I was able to further inform my research project. Primarily, I realized that it was

impossible to have this conversation without also speaking about the sociopolitical implications of trauma, as I discussed with Candy, while also taking note of Danielle's SEL and trauma informed teaching techniques. The Met case study also informed my research project, as they discussed with me what was helpful and what they wished they had done with their SEL focused lesson plans, like asking students for their feedback. This aligned with Danielle and Candy's sage advice to build a space of vulnerability and trust with students. I used these interviews and case studies as guidance to inform me as I crafted the pedagogy of my own three-week trauma-informed curriculum.

Research Project: Mini Makerz and Creature Conserve at Norwood Elementary School

My research project involved a three week collaboration between Mini Makerz, a process based art program supported by Rhode Island School of Design and with Creature Conserve, an interdisciplinary art and science community, in which I analyze my effectiveness to deliver the information effectively while also incorporating trauma informed elements into my teaching. The lesson itself was implemented at Norwood Elementary School located in our class of 3rd-5th graders during March 28th-April 11th.

The first week my co-teacher Jocelyn, (who represents both Mini Makerz and Creature Conserve) and I (who represent Mini Makerz) created lesson plans (see Appendix A) pertaining to nature and art. (See Appendix A)

The email "announcement" that Jocelyn and I sent out to the parents stated: "During the month of April, grades 3-5 are welcome to join us as we journey into the world of nature and art! We will immerse ourselves in the colorful world of pollinators. We will learn about local pollinators in Rhode Island, threats to their population, share empathy for them, exchange ideas, and find opportunities for growth at the intersection of art, science, and

conservation. During these three, fun-filled weeks,! This program is supported by: Rhode Island School of Design, The Department of Teaching + Learning in Art + Design”.

(Lawrence & Salim 2024).

We constructed a lesson plan urging students to consider: what pollinators are, how we can understand them, and how we can help them to survive.

During **week one**, Jocelyn and I taught about the local pollinators in Rhode island and the threats to their population. We held a presentation, introducing artists like Faith Williams who makes work about the biodiversity and vulnerability of pollinators and our connections to them. We also had a short discussion about the pollinator drawing sheets, followed by a collage activity. This week was designed to encourage them to gather information about pollinators and their impact on the environment, prompting students to consider: What are pollinators? What do they look like to you? How can we help them?

Week two was dedicated to visual storytelling. I began the class with class agreements, a set of expectations participated in and agreed upon by the class prioritizing safety and respect of our art community. Next, Jocelyn introduced a story making activity, engaging the class in a discussion and introducing the storytelling worksheets. This was followed by the student’s instabook creation which encouraged students to think about their [pollinator/human/flower/object] character and their motivations, prompting students to create a story about its life.

Lastly, **week three** was exploring an idea of empathy and what it means to show kindness to something or someone different to ourselves. We did this by creating dioramas. We asked ourselves, what would your garden look like if you were a pollinator, a bee, butterfly, fly, bird, etc. We asked ourselves, “what would your garden be if you were a pollinator?”. I presented on

the artist Dr. Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, who introduces this idea of “gardening with empathy”, and creates art from a pollinator’s perspective, rather than a human’s perspective (Ginsberg, 2021). Jocelyn presented the plants and elements of a garden that is essential for pollinator survival. We passed out a drawing activity so that they could brainstorm drawing their empathy gardens, engaging the kids in a discussion about empathy. I asked the students questions like: “What is empathy and how do you practice it in your own lives? and “how can you create a garden that considers the perspective of a pollinator?”. Following this activity, I then showed the children a demo about how they could create their dioramas.

The objectives of this program were to

1. Create a diorama, an instant book, and a collage
2. Discuss what pollinator are why they are important, and how we can help them via photo documentation and verbal documentation
3. Put themselves “in the shoes” of a pollinator
 - a. Shown via storytelling, verbal documentation
4. Define empathy
 - a. Voice memo, student assessment, stories
 - b. Photo documentation of Student collages, stories, gardens, based on prompts, stories and voice memos

FINDINGS and ANALYSIS

Case Studies & Interviews Analyses

In this section, I will discuss the educational approaches of the Metropolitan Museum and the trauma informed educators, Candy Gonzalez and Danielle Singh. I will conclude by focusing on my own research project at Norwood Elementary School.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art


The Metropolitan of Art described their process in detail, recounting collaborating extensively with D75 schools, putting in a proposal specifically to work with people with disabilities. They mentioned that a few schools on their list ended up changing based on who was interested in and who the grant approved. The education directors held planning meetings to involve the school teachers and principals, having teaching artists from the Met co-develop a curriculum with the teacher. The curriculums set out to reach the SEL classroom goals, implementing research as well as SEL structures that the Met has used successfully in prior programs. The educators themselves were a diverse group and some of them even had training in trauma informed practice.

In general, the curriculum encompassed thirty lesson plans organized into five units designed to accommodate children with emotional disturbances, sensory impairments, and multiple disabilities (Holderand et al. 2022, Figure 1.2).

..... Unit 1-Lesson 5

Unit 1-Lesson 5

How can music help us build relationships and a sense of community?



Kamānche. Iran (Persian). ca. 1880. Wood, metal, bone, and gut. H. 14 1/2 in., W. 6 in., Diam. 5 1/2 in. Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Thatcher M. Brown III Gift, 1988 (1988.72)

..... Unit 1-Lesson 5

Outcomes
Students will...

- Focus on how they can listen to their friends and treat them with kindness and love.
- Practice noticing a work of art and sharing what they see, hear, and think about the object.
- Play their musical instrument to create calm and focus for themselves.
- Build relationships with others by engaging in music making together.

SEL Standards

- Relationship skills

Questions

- Take a moment to look at this object. What different parts to you see?
- What parts of this object make a sound? What would a musician use to play it?
- Notice the decorations. How has the artist embellished this object?
- Why might an artist add decoration to a musical instrument?
- Click the "Listen" link on the [object page](#) to hear how the kamānche sounds. What does it sound like? What does it make you think of?
- What are some ways that music might bring us closer to others in our community?

Key Information

- The kamānche is played with a bow and is the earliest documented type of bowed musical instrument.
- The kamānche can be played by itself but is usually accompanied by a drum or played as part of an ensemble.
- This kamānche is decorated with zigzags and flowers made with a mosaic of wood, bone, and brass.

Materials

- 3-foot cardboard shipping tubes with plastic end caps (one per student)
- 2 1/4-inch siding nails
- Ball-peen hammers (4 ounce)
- A variety of dry beans and rice
- Markers (including metallic)
- Masking or painter's tape (optional)

Activity:
Making Your Own Rain Stick

- Share with students that they will have an opportunity to make their own instrument and make music with others in their classroom community.
- Ask students to draw rings, approximately four to six inches apart, along the entire length of the tube. Demonstrate to students how to hammer three nails, evenly spaced, around each ring. Ask students to add beans and rice to the tube and seal. Tape can also be applied to cover the nail heads.
- Invite students to decorate the outside of the tube with markers.
- Once they feel their decoration is complete, students should move their rain sticks to create music. Invite them to listen to the sound of the rain sticks and consider how the sound makes them feel.

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Figure 1.5 Lesson plan example (K-5) (Holderand et al. 2022)

The educators informed me that while educators utilized curriculums like the one above (figure 1.5), the museum used online teacher workshops and surveys to glean insights into the progress. Kirsten informed me that they occasionally still get positive feedback. Kirsten stated:

Even like until recently, I think maybe a month ago we got an email from a teacher, just who's fantastic and so joyous to share that one of her students who created some pieces of art that were clothing, was still two years later, very thrilled and excited to be able to wear the art they made. They were very proud to wear it and show it to their classmates. And so, I mean, those kinds of things we hear and just really makes it all worth it for one. But it is so special to hear about how impactful this program was for those students!

voices on how things were for them, and what they gained or needed more of (Barrientes, personal communication, November 15, 2023).

While the educators at The Met reported that they received positive feedback like this from the surveys during the program and emails, they admitted they did not have a long-term method of tracking student SEL acquisition due to COVID constraints.

Overall, the creators of this curriculum intended to support the students' artistic abilities as well as their overall social and emotional well-being. Their lesson plans aimed to promote self awareness through emotional regulation, empathy, and relationship-building skills. Activities such as mark-making for stress management or using symbols into their artwork to visually communicate their strengths and values were a few ways in which students learned to express themselves, adapt to challenges, and meaningfully connect with their peers (Holderand et al. 2022). Furthermore, collaborative art lessons or assignments that involved self portraiture encouraged students to deeply reflect on their community and their personal identity, understanding that the world has a number of diverse perspectives, including their own (Holderand et al. 2022). In the future, however, they will be more intentional about following through on through on amplifying students' voices and tracking their success

I was interested to hear that in regards to incorporating SEL and trauma-informed care into on-site museum programs, that many museum programs have an emphasis on community building, giving students choices, and offer time to reflect, getting consent from students to participate and offering tailored support, especially for students with disabilities. Christina and Kirstin shared that their educational philosophy is both “inquiry based” and “discussion-pedagogy oriented”, meaning that talks with children are meant to be student focused, meaningful and open ended. They are meant to explore the learner’s experiences and

how it relates to the artwork. Students are encouraged to explore various themes such as color usage, portraiture, and discuss the authenticity of an artwork.

The Met aspires to provide a transformative educational experience that goes beyond the conventional classroom setting. They have multicultural exhibits and accessible programs. They have demonstrated their willingness to spread this message to underserved populations, especially to individuals with disabilities, within and outside of their museum (Holderand et al., 2022; The Met., n.d.). Like any large institution, there were aspects that did not align with my program, Teaching + Learning in Art + Design's philosophy, such as the exorbitant museum prices, for one, as museums have a history of pricing-out audiences who cannot afford to pay the cost of a membership, leaving a population of museum patrons who are overwhelmingly white and middle-class (O'Hara, 2018). This seems a bit contradictory given that it is the Met's mission to be more inclusive and reach diverse audiences. At no fault of the educators running the program, it is questionable that they were not able to receive the funding/support from institutions to track a project like the Social Emotional Learning initiative.

When thinking about my future in art education, I want to work with an organization that follows through on its promises to the community that it is serving. My interactions with Christina and Kirsten individuals via email and zoom were very friendly. I was also pleased to hear more about their art education practice as a whole. While I may question the authenticity of a large institution as a whole, it is the people within it who have the capacity to create meaningful, impactful change, especially if they are given enough time, resources, and support.

Danielle Singh: Quidnessett Elementary School

I was also very fortunate to be able to interview Danielle Singh, a trauma informed art educator who works with underserved youth at North Kingstown School District in Rhode Island.

According to Singh, the pocket of children who attend this school is one with a high level of trauma. She recalled that prior to implementing both SEL, trauma informed instruction, and conscious-discipline instruction, they were “failing as a school” and “not meeting [the children’s] needs” (Singh, personal communication, 2024). She described their behaviors, even pre-covid, as extremely high-level and the only thing that stabilized their environment was shifting to meet the demands of the environment. The core of her philosophy revolves around having a reliable team of individuals such as a full-time, school psychologist, a full-time social worker, and a behavior specialist. But the core element of trauma informed work for Singh was building relationships with her students. She stated, “you can’t close the academic gap until you get them to trust being in the school setting” (Singh, personal communication, 2024). In other words, For traumatized children or students with social emotional needs, that they require is trust and safety within the environment and from the teacher. I asked her about her relationship with teaching social emotional learning and art education and she replied that “art is the SEL” (Singh, personal communication, 2024).

The art room is the children’s safe haven and allows them to build social skills while they participate in activities, while trauma-informed pedagogy is the language and responses that the educator applies toward any given situation. Singh was trained as a trauma informed certified teacher through the Arizona Institute. She admits that while it did not prepare her for the more “hands on”, practical nature of her job, she did say the following about the advantages of being trauma certified. She stated, “It gave me some tools in my toolkit. I have this common language,

I have some things that I can look out for that will be helpful for me in my practice” (Singh, D personal communication, 2024).

Another element of trauma informed instruction for Singh is about being observant. She regularly checks in with students, asking them “what is their high and low of the day” and if they want to share it. Singh, in particular, has been trained in what is called conscious discipline. This is about incorporating common, trauma-informed language, and knowing how to deescalate an emotionally dysregulated child. It is also about knowing how to incorporate social, emotional, physical, cultural, and cognitive, learning domains into one curriculum (Bailey, n.d.). It teaches a number of skills such as anger management, helpfulness, assertiveness, cooperation, empathy, and problem solving (Bailey, n.d.).

In her classroom, Singh uses a stop light system, green is a happy student that is doing their work and having meaningful conversation with peers and teachers. Yellow is exhibiting microaggressions, for example, snapping their pencil, breaking their pencil tips or trying to get their friend in trouble. This is an indication to her that a behavior is about to turn into a “red”, “high-level, behavior which can look like “flipping the chairs or eloping out of the room” (Singh, personal communication, 2024).

I was curious if every school, not only high-level behavior schools could benefit from trauma informed and SEL instruction like this, where the need might not be as apparent. Singh replied in the affirmative. She spoke to me about how she’s come to understand trauma as something that can manifest in childhood, affecting everyone differently and manifesting mentally or physically in different ways. She says that trauma informed instruction is not simply a pocket. It exists everywhere and everyone can benefit from an SEL, trauma informed, and art

instruction. It is a shame, she says, that due to a lack of funding, the arts programs at her school are becoming less accessible for children who truly need it as their safe space.

During my visit, I highlighted important aspects of the classroom practices, the school environment in general, and the school's calm space. During class, I noticed that Danielle At the beginning of class, she gives an introduction to new artists, focusing on areas of difficulty such as understanding primary and secondary colors. She engages in regular circulation and check-ins. She engages in a tailored teaching approach based on academic needs. She provides exposure to various artistic mediums and styles to encourage creative expression and understanding that there is no right or wrong in art. She places an emphasis on sharing and comparing different artistic styles. She maintains attention through humor and special cues. Common phrases that she employs are "Give me five," "Are we ready," and "If you finish, you may work in a sketchbook.". Overall, I noticed a great deal of structure but also agency in this class. For instance, each student has a role that they get assigned at some point during the week that they get to complete to help emphasize a sense of classroom community and responsibility, such as

As for the environment itself, the school is an open layout design, with sectioned off spaces to denote separate grades and classrooms. Danielle's classroom is one of the only enclosed classrooms. Danille believes that community spaces would better serve the school rather than the community learning model that Quidnessett Elementary School employs. She does not believe that this open-concept layout necessarily aids learning because student crises often take away from effective learning.

One aspect about their school that I found incredibly fascinating was in addition to school teachers and counselors, they also have trained social workers and behavior specialists. Danielle explained that because they have so many children with trauma (many students coming from

foster care or unhoused situations) they were unequipped to address student needs of these students without the expertise of trauma informed individuals. She attributes this to the trauma informed measures that have been put in place such as code words, trained staff, and clear consequences.

When I briefly introduced myself to a few of the students and inquired as to their favorite class, “art class” was the most popular answer. It is incredibly unfortunate that there has been a loss of grant funding and that this program is longer being supported.

Prior to my leaving, I had a discussion with Danielle and the school social worker about the effectiveness of the school’s “calm space”, a separate room where a child experiencing extreme emotional highs can go to regulate and reflect. I only briefly saw into the room myself but the teachers say that it has become worn overtime and with use. However, there are plans (with Danielle’s help), to make it more visually appealing and inviting. Some students find it helpful, but they all use it differently, carrying out established routines within the calm space. One student’s routine includes the following:

- Calm safe body
- Five deep breaths and no moving on until this is complete
- Drumming with “conscious discipline in mind”. First I go, then you!
- Drumming
- Feeling buddies (She must determine what the stuffed animals are feeling?)
- Task completion-finish a sheet of work
- Holding an adults hand on the way back to the classroom
- At the end, she will receive a star added to her chart

This individualized approach ensures the space meets the diverse needs of every student. One child in the area who tends to dysregulate and utilize the calm space said that he does not like the calm space and that he does not feel as though it is a safe environment for it. Danielle asked “where is a safe environment for you?”. He smiled and replied “art class!”

Candy Gonzales: Trauma Competent Art Educator

I met Candy Gonzalez, a trauma informed art educator through professor recommendation and I emailed them, asking if they would be available for an interview. To start, They spoke to me about their time in their MFA program and their experiences working as an artist, describing a certain level of “hyper visibility” (Gonzalez personal communication, February 5, 2024) and risk that they faced as a non-white person with immigrant relatives. Candy mentioned that they used their artmaking as a conduit to talk about immigrant narratives from an immigrant perspective. They say that they, like all people, use art to “process difficult emotions and grief, to process trauma, to process some of the most difficult experiences we have as humans (Gonzalez personal communication, February 5, 2024).

They mentioned a glaring issue that is prevalent in many education systems all across the United States. They stated, “I didn't have a lot of emotional support at that time. And when you're in an art school setting in an MFA program, those programs are really built in the most unsupportive way. It is apparent how little society and school districts value our education within and outside of an arts classroom as evident by Candy's situation. They so aptly mentioned that “We learn so many skills that are applicable to so many different parts of our lives through art making” (Gonzalez personal communication, February 5, 2024).

There's a reason for this, Candy asserts, “My perspective on trauma informed pedagogy has shifted quite a bit in the past couple of years. I think a lot about the fact that our schooling

systems are colonial structures. They are harmful and perpetuate harm and trauma. And so all this to say our institutions that are designed to perpetuate trauma are also the spaces we seek to heal from trauma” (Gonzalez, personal communication, February 5, 2024).

They noticed that “schools weren't supporting [students] the way that they deserved to be supported...but I also didn't have the tools and I wanted to seek out tools that I could use to support them...because the institution was not providing it (Gonzalez, personal communication, February 5, 2024)”. They mentioned tools like the Bartel Foundation Trauma Informed Practice for Teaching Artists, where they received their certification and also another school based out of Philadelphia called the Lakeside Global Institute (Gonzalez, personal communication, February 5, 2024).

Candy described experiencing the same advantages and drawbacks as Danielle who received her trauma certification through an Arizona based trauma organization. Both specialists noted that the programs, while helpful in teaching the language and context for trauma informed work, was largely “theory heavy” and did not provide practical experience.

Despite this, Candy stated that the year and a half long program yielded promising results for them and their teaching:

“I could see that tangibly [trauma-informed education] was helping me support [the students], and I could see that they felt more comfortable and that they felt more at ease.”

One thing that their trauma informed education could not teach, Candy expressed, was building a trusting relationship with their students. While they noted a shift in how they were able to understand and interact with their class, Candy believes that the training was merely a conduit for their real work: “the class felt the environment shit, which is great! But again I do not think that trauma-informed practice is the end all be all. I think it is a tool that we can use to

support people as we work towards radically changing or dismantling structures that perpetuate harm”(Gonzalez. C personal communication 2024).

Comparably, Danielle Singh mentioned about establishing trust between student and teacher in a high-behavior environment, simply incorporating trauma-informed education & SEL into a classroom without structural change to the educational system is not a "long term sustainable solution. But in the moment it is incredibly helpful because some of what you learn as a trauma-informed educator can help you establish connection with your students and hold space for them. Which in and of itself, if you hold space for a student, if they feel like they can trust you, if they feel supported, they're more likely to learn and engage (Gonzalez, personal communication, February 5, 2024).”

Trauma informed educators and SEL education are crucial but so are responsible institutions. We spoke about balancing expectations as an educator and navigating trauma informed practice. Candy notes that, “For me, I've learned trauma informed practice. Yeah. Kids can be exceedingly helpful as somebody who wasn't a trained educator. Now I am. And so I can look back and see, actually no, that was, that was super helpful. So I really related when you said that SEL is not inherently trauma-informed.”

SEL can be a tool that is used within trauma-informed practice, but it is not used responsibly. Because what happens is that when we sit, when we lean on these mindfulness, social emotional learning approaches, we're kind of removing the onus from institutions that need to change their practices in order to create supportive practices, I mean, supportive environments instead of, so we're not holding those institutions accountable...we focus on like individual responsibility when, like at, in an infrastructural level, we're just not set up to succeed (Gonzalez. C personal communication 2024).”

Overall, “the classroom”, Candy says “is just a microcosm of a larger ecological system. School environments can be traumatizing. It's like a legacy of colonialism (Gonzalez. C personal communication 2024).”

I mentioned to Candy how their mentioning of the colonial education system reminds me of the literature about shame-based discipline. I asked if they could speak a bit about how trauma manifests and how it is linked to shame.

Candy mentioned that this made them think about Brene Brown and Tanara Burke’s work. They explained that “trauma and shame are kind of adjacent to each other” and that “sometimes trauma can lead to feelings of shame but that shaming, the verb, can perpetuate trauma...So experiencing shaming and the feelings that come with shame, can lead to trauma, but it might not. But both trauma and shame, can trigger trauma responses or fear responses, whether that's fight, flight, or freeze...They have people questioning their sense of self...trusting themselves, trusting the people around them, believing that they could do better, believing that they could grow, believing that they can change...Trauma and shame both impact and hurt those feelings that potentiality that human every human has. We all have the potential to change. We all have the potential to grow. We all have the potential to form loving, caring relationships, but trauma has us questioning that and so does shame.”

In other words, shaming individuals and incurring trauma are linked. Considering that marginalized individuals exist in societies that regularly shame them for their one or multiple identities that do not resemble a socially acceptable standard, I asked Candy how they approach trauma informed-art education when teaching individuals with intersectional identities.

They emphasized that when working with individuals who “live at the intersection of multiple oppressed identities”, and “are sometimes not even recognized within their own, within

their own communities”, Candy, as an educator, tries “to center those people as much as possible the design of [their] teaching”.

Candy mentioned an author that she reads, Kimberle Crenshaw, who realized that “social justice movements don't serve people, at the intersection of marginality, because they operate from a top down perspective (Gonzalez. C personal communication, 2024)” Meaning that “those on the social justice movements are designed to liberate people who are otherwise privileged, but for one identity...they're designed to liberate, white women who are privileged, but for their womanhood, or they were designed to liberate black men who are privileged, but for their being black. Black women could not be seen by either one of those movements. Because neither of them accounted for their experiences of being both black and women....Kimberle Crenshaw has adjusted that to say, and now, you know, some movements can account for people who are black women, trans, queer, disabled, and those people exist, you know, like, they're out here being like, actively oppressed and also trying to live and survive in a society that like really targets every part of their existence...What she said was, is we need to shift from a top down model to a bottom up model, right. That centers the people at the bottom ...for example, if we work towards the liberation of somebody who is, you know, black trans woman, we are more likely to liberate everyone else....So it is really important for me to center the experiences of not just the most vulnerable people, but also like the most marginalized people with a bottom up approach.”

Candy spoke about their own experience as both a student and a teacher and a student, with someone with intersectional identities. They gave an example, saying that “as someone who is brown queer, non-binary, immigrant, it's still not as if I'm on the bottom” so that as an educator, they would be mindful of students with marginalized identities and experiences different than their own and make space for them (Gonzalez. C personal communication, 2024).

To me, this part of the conversation perfectly encapsulates Candy's argument that the "Trauma-informed practice is about restructuring our teaching practice to be supportive of trauma impacted people" (Gonzalez. C personal communication, 2024). However, this will only do so much if only a single educator is involved within an organization rife with systemic issues. Because of this colonial system, the system of the United States in general has reflected the cultural norms and values of the predominantly white, wealthy, Western societies. Spaces for those with marginalized identities, especially educational spaces, do not reflect the experiences or offer support ways, not even for the youngest of our generation. In fact, these spaces are founded on years of hatred and violence against minorities.

Lastly, I asked Candy about the themes of their artwork: body politics, fat phobia and self-healing, how this into their work as a trauma educator and their understanding of intersectionality. Furthermore, I asked how this representation contributed to the healing of themselves and their students.

Their answer was: "we all carry so much body trauma, even folks who aren't fat. Because anti-fat lives in all of us...it is the least talked about form of oppression". For instance, "this self hate related to bodies, it lives in all of us...developing comfort within my body, felt quite a radical thing to do. I think for people around me who saw me doing it, it felt like a radical thing for them to see. For my friends and people who have encountered my art, like, based on conversations with them, I feel like I've had people, like of all body types, say, 'I don't know that I've experienced comfort and I want to... and it feels like such a hard journey'"

In all, Candy expressed that they feel grateful for their trauma-informed journey and gave this to me as an example as something that is strongly tied to their identity that, when given space, led to people reflecting on their own experiences of body trauma, their own relationship to

anti-fatness, and ultimately, a reflection of their own experiences of oppression. This part of the discussion reminded me of the discussion of vulnerability that Candy mentioned earlier in the interview. I also believe that giving a voice to a highly marginalized identity and restructuring a previously inaccessible space to allow freedom of expression for the most vulnerable person in the room, can begin to untangle this complicated system of bias within our educational systems.

“Research Project: Mini Makerz and Creature Conserve at Norwood Elementary School

I began this thesis by analyzing the following research questions:

1. What role does art education play in promoting healing, cooperation, healthy communication, gratitude, and embracing imperfection?
2. How can art educators enhance the social-emotional and healing nature of their practice by incorporating trauma-informed components?
3. How can educators navigate challenges arising from student trauma within educational systems that perpetuate hierarchical and oppressive patterns?
4. How can educational spaces be transformed from places of oppression that retraumatize students into spaces of healing that empower them to be their best selves?

Over the course of three weeks, my co-teacher, Jocelyn, and I created lesson plans for and conducted nature related art classes for fifteen students with a Norwood Elementary School afterschool classroom. In addition to bringing them these classes, Jocelyn and I also had the hope of gathering data for our theses.

While my study covers topics such as the enhancing the social-emotional influence of art education through trauma-informed practices, Jocelyn's thesis covers creating lessons that foster empathy and connection between human and nature through art education.

With emergent pedagogy as a methodology, it allowed me to think critically about the outcomes of each lesson and provided Jocelyn and I the flexibility to restructure the curriculum and/or pedagogy to address the needs of specific students in the class.

Based on these changes, I have now organized my findings into five distinct themes that emerged over the course of three weeks, such as: student agency, establishing trust through vulnerability, challenging shame based structures, maintaining a consistent environment, and removing stress. In my mind, these themes (which all emerge in trauma informed pedagogy (Vandillen, 2020) demonstrate why incorporating trauma informed instruction into educational environments is necessary for both the students and educators. This is necessary in order for all students to reap the social emotional benefits of art-education.

In my research project, I highlight several themes such as student agency, establishing trust through vulnerability, challenging shame based structures, maintaining a consistent environment, and removing stress. These themes appeared over the weeks of this project and highlight this need within classrooms.

I believe that educators have the opportunity to understand how trauma works not only in the mind but through the ways trauma is ingrained in societal systems and institutions. While it is not necessary for educators to know every detail of a student's life, we can be compassionate and supportive of students by having an awareness of how all of our students are impacted. When we are cognizant and respond to our student's diverse needs, the classroom becomes more trauma informed and students can benefit from the social emotional learning of the art.

After reviewing the field notes and coding emergent themes, as an art educator for these students, I found that removing stress, encouraging student agency (choice & voice), establishing vulnerability & trust, challenging shame based structures, and maintaining a clear and consistent environment, were illustrative of the social emotional effects of art education, especially when an educator is intentional about incorporating trauma informed practices into the lesson. Without these aspects, children were not reaping the same social-emotional benefits of art making.

This was apparent in week two of our three week program. While many of these elements are prevalent across all three weeks such as vulnerability & trust, stress removal, positive reinforcement, aspects such as choice, maintaining a clear and consistent environment, and stress removal were lacking in week two, which I believe were some of the elements that contributed to the dip in focus. Our strongest weeks as a class were weeks one and three, where these elements were more evenly distributed. In week three, we had the most materials and structure, the most trust established, and more opportunities for tailored support.

As educators, it is crucial that we recognize that every student has unmet needs. Some needs emerge due to unresolved trauma which can be exacerbated in educational settings for any number of reasons but especially when educators shame students with disciplinary tactics for not performing in ways that conform to established hierarchies.

Below are notes ordered and abbreviated. (See Appendix B)

Personal Reflection

Removing Stress

As mentioned in my research project, after extensive research and after reflecting on my conversations with trauma informed art educators, I went began this research project with the intention of applying the trauma-informed practices that I had become aware of over the course of my conversations and research, such as building trust and encouraging vulnerability, removing stress, and otherwise.

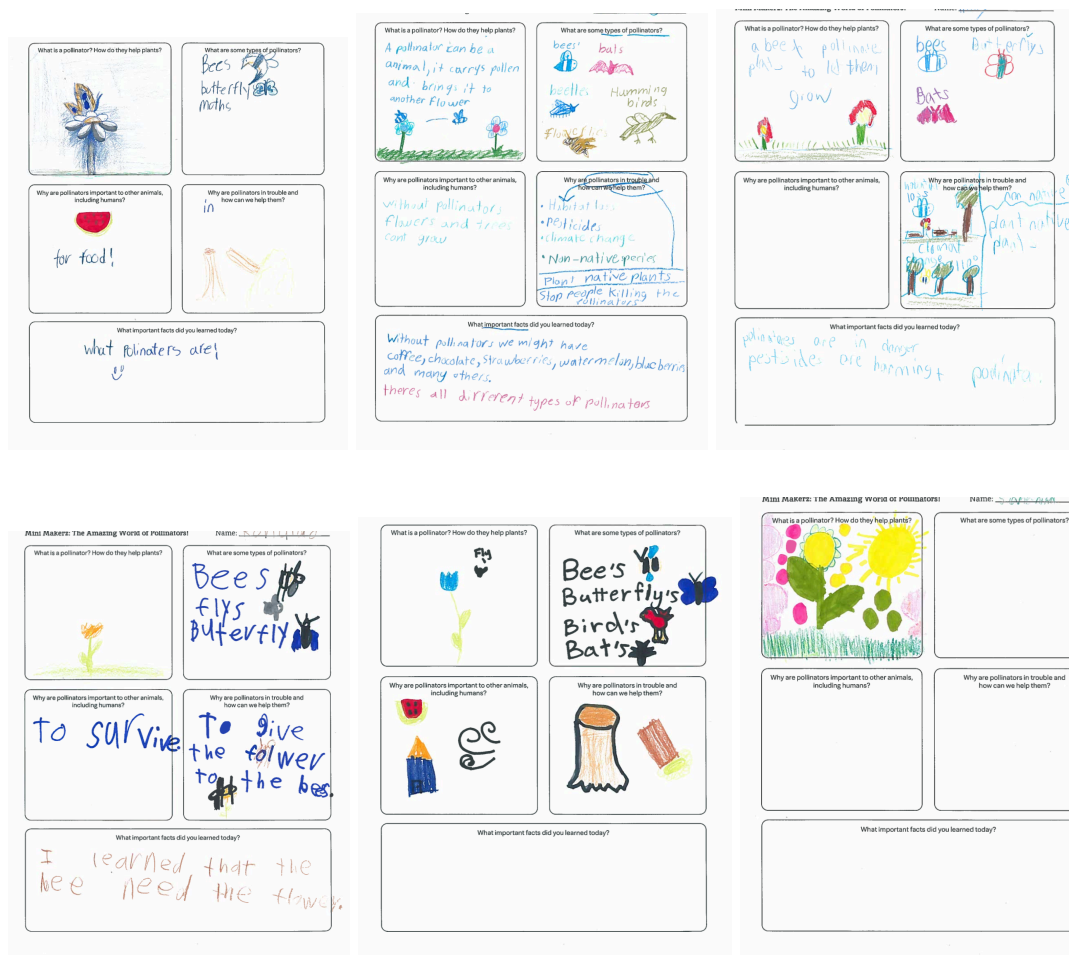
During week one, Jocelyn and I passed out pollinator worksheets, emphasizing that there was no right or wrong way to complete the worksheets. Students could write or draw and they could complete one or all of the prompts, as long as they generated some ideas for the collage that would follow!

Part of trauma-informed pedagogy states that an individual is more likely to have trauma than not, and that, in order to understand this, educators might consider how closely linked trauma is with shame ((Dolezal & Gibson, 2022). For children, who are still shaping their identities, who may already have it embedded in their psyche, the school environment can be a breeding ground for shame (Dolezal & Gibson, 2022), all educators understand a student's need for connection, love, and belonging and address these needs with patience and compassion in order to create a safe environment. Understanding behavioral needs that stem from trauma as trauma responses like “fight, flight, freeze, or fawn” (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021, p. 50), or even referring to other models or ways of understanding, is helpful for adopting a compassionate approach. Afterall, authentic, compassionate connection is necessary for human survival (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021).

Jocelyn and I were vocal about creating this safe space removing high risk aspects away from the collage project as a whole, and we were verbal about it during our teaching, emphasizing growth rather than performance.

During week one, Jocelyn and I also emphasized that while the lesson is based on what they find interesting about pollinators, that this was an opportunity for them to gather ideas, explore the art and explore the information that we learned about.

In order to reduce overall stress, we let them know from the beginning that the class was not graded. I believe that we were successful in this area, as shown in the beginning and the end of the lesson for example. Students were free to answer one or all of the questions on the fact finding “worksheet”



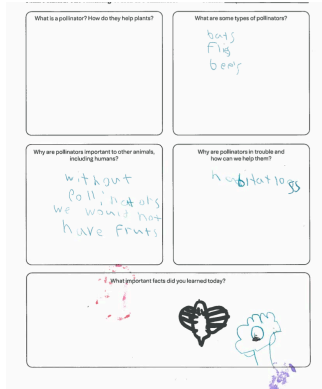


Figure 1.6 Student Pollinator Worksheets

During week one, the words from Candy Gonzalez, trauma informed educator, came to mind quite frequently. In my discussion with them, they emphasized how schooling systems are harmful colonial structures that perpetuate trauma. I could notice evidence of this anxiety in the way that some students were hesitant to trust in their own artistic process, a testament to shame's firm grasp on the way they perceived their performance within the class setting.

One student grew increasingly frustrated with herself when she couldn't create a mosaic similar to the mosaic that I had created as a demo.



Figure 1.7 My Demo

She was frustrated that it was “too hard” to arrange it how she wanted. I worked with her to first arrange it in a pattern that was to her liking before she glued the several pieces on at a time. After this step, I also told her that it was alright if hers looked any kind of way, attempting to vocally soothe some of her worries about creating a design that was not “correct”. I told her that collages can incorporate a number of different kinds of pictures: whether they are stacked on top of each other or arranged side by side. She eventually began to add larger pictures to her collage and even a drawing to her collage while also making deliberate choices pertaining to the lesson.



Figure 1.8 Student Art

As they were working, a few students were worried about what would “happen” if they did not finish. Jocelyn and I let them know that it was absolutely ok if they did not finish, that they could finish it later, at home and even take a few supplies with them if they wanted. We emphasized that it is “ok, as long as you try your best!”.

Agency: Student Choice & Voice

During week one, Jocelyn and I attempted to create an optimal space for art-making that would show all of the materials and encourage the students with the possibilities prior to their art project. There was a (a bee table, a butterfly table, a flowerfly table, and a bat table) and a choice

at which table to sit at. We tried to also set up the supplies in a way that was hopefully appealing and exciting, with many options to choose from.



Figure 1.9 week one-Set Up

When they began, we asked if we could take photos of their art and also gave them plenty of choice when it came to drawing or writing their responses to the pollinator sheets.

Students were allowed to choose their materials and begin creating their images. We were very accepting and curious about the many ideas that emerged as we made our rounds.

For instance, as I was asking students about their choices, one student described his choice to create a penguin with a jetpack flying into Minecraft portal as his pollinator image. Another student described how he was inspired by bat images to create a hummingbird doing its rounds.



Figure 2.0 Student Art

I was glad to see that students were incorporating their own ideas into the lesson. While some students took a more non traditional approach, some students applied as many images as possible, making use of all of the materials.



Figure 2.1 Student Art

Another student expressed uncertainty about his choice to cover the yellow center of his “flower”, but was excited when told that his choice actually was a wonderful example of how colleges can employ techniques like layering!



Figure 2.2 Student Art

Below are other examples of student work



Figure 2.3 Student

In week two, though Jocelyn and I had plenty of examples of students sharing their voice in this class, Jocelyn and I could have more avenues for choice!

Choice is a central element in teaching philosophies like Reggio Emilia, an approach that empowers children by allowing them to choose their own form of communication through materials (Aden & Theodotou, 2019). Choice and voice is a crucial component of trauma informed pedagogy as well. It offers individuals a sense of empowerment and allows them to feel as if their ideas and experiences are honored.

Furthermore, there are even effects that reveal how offering a student a sense of control can aid with emotional regulation (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy, 2020), something that could have

benefited a few students during week two's class. Overall, what we, as educators, can offer is patience and guidance, as children learn best when they are supported and presented with the freedom to express themselves in a multitude of ways.

Another student who was a bit uncertain in the initial stages of the insta-book, chose to work with a bright blue color because of her love of Lilo and stitch.

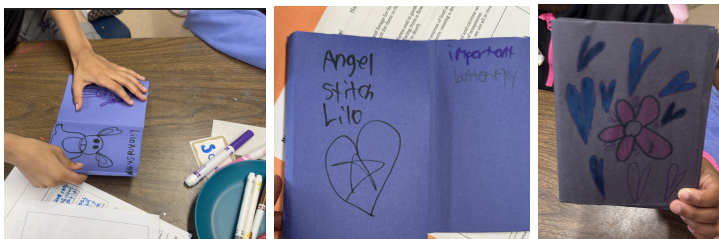


Figure 2.4 Student Art

After some tailored support, she eventually made a pollinator book that incorporated both elements. She was *significantly* less distracted during week two. I believe that this is because she incorporated her interests into the lesson and perhaps because breaking the assignment up into small achievable goals in addition to showing interest, as well as encouragement was very helpful.

The student's tablemate, a new student, was understandably confused in the beginning about what a pollinator was and how to do the assignment. Inspired by her friend, she decided that she would add her favorite elements of "Totally Spies" into her pollinator book. According to Reggio Emilia philosophy, student interest emerges when they are able to choose their own modes of communication and when they feel also empowered (Aden & Theodotou 2019). These two were incredibly excited to share their pollinator books!

Jocelyn and I checked in on every student, providing tailored support when needed but largely allowing the students to decide how they wanted to create scenes responding to the prompt “*create a garden with empathy*”.

Many of the students had wonderful visual responses for the prompt “*what does a garden planted with empathy for pollinators look like?*” and this aided in the creation of their project. Some students created traditional garden spaces, some students thought up more surprising ideas such as museum gardens, lemonade stands, and even greenhouses for pollinators to enjoy.



Figure 2.5 Student Art

After the planning portion, many students considered how their placement of plants would impact the butterflies and bees that came into the spaces.



Figure 2.6 Student Art

One student made “a park that's made for pollinators and humans”, another made “a garden for pollinators to live”, another student wanted both “pollinators, animals, and Stitch from Lilo and Stitch” to come to her garden.”

The neurodivergent student who needed prompting or tailored support, during weeks 1 and 2, was very interested in this lesson! He worked the entire time and was very excited to share about his process during and at the end of the end of class during share time. He needed very few tailored approaches to this lesson so it seems that he benefited from having lots of agency and choices in materials. He benefited from having a clear lesson that engaged in sensory materials. That allowed him the freedom to engage in art topics that interested him. It was not explicitly pollinator related but he did create a space for “beautiful fish!” and he was delighted by different colors that he was able to create by mixing brown, white, and dark blue.



Figure 2.7 Student Art

Addressing Behavior: Challenging Shame Based Structures

During week one's class, there were a few reminders needed to "please respect our peers' voices" while they were sharing about their artwork and also a few reminders needed to help during cleanup.

This prompted me to consider engaging the class in a "class agreement" activity before week two's class, covering topics such as

- Respecting our peers
 - Respectful language and listening ears
- Respecting the art space
 - Helping during cleanup
 - Taking care of materials
- Respecting our own art time
 - This is your time to have fun with art.
 - There is no wrong. Try your best!
 - Don't hesitate to ask for help!

I asked them what they thought about these points, and made sure to receive and write down feedback. I was very intentional about keeping accusation or blame out of my words, I made sure that my words were more future oriented such as growth, and community, focused, emphasizing and questioning how we could move forward as a community when considering what a safe and respectful classroom looks like.

My goal with introducing these at the beginning of this class was to establish, together, agreements that we collaborate on and, in the future, honor as a class. I asked them what they thought of the agreements and if they wanted to add any. Once we concluded, I told them they

were always welcome to come up with me or Jocelyn if they want to add or discuss the agreements, or if they need any help.

This class got a little busy during some portions, especially once the activity first began, but an occasional verbal reminder class of their agreements as well as walking over for a check-in on the table was beneficial in drawing everybody's focus back in. Positive reinforcement through encouragement and showing interest in their ideas was also helpful.

The after school coordinator came in at the end and said kids have given really great feedback about the program and would love to have us back for another program. She is the same person who pointed out a table of four boys and invited us to "call down to the office if anyone at that table ever needs to take a walk."

The students were a bit rowdy but nothing more drastic than occasionally getting up out of their seat and being overly energetic. However, walking over to their table to check on their process, reminding the whole class to please respect their art time, giving their table demos, and asking them questions about their interesting ideas usually worked in prompting them to return to their seat or focus their attention.

I suppose that it is nice to have an option for students that are a bit overstimulated or just need a moment to have a moment of quiet to regulate or reflect. However, I would not use "calling down to the office" as a warning. I am certain that there is a different way to phrase it so that it does not carry the same connotation. I definitely need to build more trust with these students. Upon reflection, I think they need more choices and tailored support in the beginning of the lesson, since that is where they got the most distracted.

At the end of week two, Jocelyn and I discussed the dip in student focus at the beginning of class. I suggested:

- 1. Being intentional about supporting specific students who tend to get distracted early on, before checking in on the students who tended to start without challenges.
- 2. Offer more choices in terms of materials, like we did week one!
- 3. Formatting the hook to be more age-conscious in order to their attention

By week three, Jocelyn and I saw a major improvement in student focus and engagement!

Besides a few minor distractions, even the students who struggled to stay focused during week two were engaged the entire class. For instance, week two's category three students (students who, during week two, got distracted due to a lack of agency and tailored support). To expand on the latter point, applying the clear and consistent structure, similar to week one, worked very well. Every student absolutely thrived this week!

We had music playing at a reasonable volume (which is a ritual that we neglected to incorporate in session two, that definitely added to the ambiance). They expressed that they were sad that this was the last lesson and regretful that they did not have more time to finish.

For example, the works below belong to a table of energetic boys. Two of the boys needed a bit of tailored support in the beginning when it came to redirecting their energy to the material table, but once they had chosen their materials and boxes, their whole group had a drastic increase in focus and attention. I attribute this to several factors:





Figure 2.8 Student Art

•For one, having a more structured, age-focused lesson, allowed for more structured support in the beginning! Students were eager to engage in the materials right away and most got on task. Those who needed some additional guidance could be easily redirected because of tailored support, especially the table of boys as seen above!

•Furthermore, after allowing them to choose the materials they wanted, they remained working. This freedom to engage in art in ways that appealed to them was key to their learning. Ayre & Krishnamoorthy (2020), note that offering a student a sense of control can aid with emotional regulation. This week and week one activities were highly kinesthetic in nature. Coupled with the fact that these projects allowed for choice and both included media that is classified as what art therapists would refer to as *resistive media*, or materials that are tactile and physically engaging (ETC Assessment, 2017). In other words, these media were more grounding. Studies have shown that kinesthetic activities with resistive media can release tension, promote relaxation, and increase the ability to tolerate difficult emotions like anxiety. Interestingly, anxiety can manifest as distress, irritability, anger, **restlessness** and **inattentiveness** (The Palmeira Practice, 2019). Brummer, & Thorsborne (2021) write that “Fight” responses of the fight, flight, Freeze, Fawn, “Stress Response” behaviors in school can manifest in unexpected ways such as **silliness**, **pacing**, **getting up from desks** and other behaviors that one wouldn’t

typically expect, some of which the group of boys were engaging in during week two when they lacked structure and the ability to channel their ideas (p. 50).

- Prompting and encouraging specific students to explore materials, to walk me through their process & tailored approaches and friendly, patient check-ins with positive reinforcement were needed only a few times to redirect behavior.

The Reggio Emilia approach encourages educators to build trust and establish connection through active listening as a form of documentation. I attempted to do more frequent check-ins with this table (Rinaldi, 2001). This, coupled with positive reinforcement, patient check-ins, did wonders in establishing trust that had been lacking between me and the boys at this table in the previous weeks. A few of them asked for help with art advice and with materials, something that they had never requested in previous weeks! Though this was likely a small factor, we also had access to music this week which one student requested immediately upon walking into the room. There was age-appropriate music playing, occasionally shuffling to songs requested by several students in week one. For the most part, students worked calmly for a majority of the time with only a few minor distractions, prompting redirection methods. Overall, redirection methods such as calling attention to our agreements, emphasizing our art space as one of respect and safety were helpful. This was strengthened by initially building trust by patiently and compassionately checking in with students, giving them authentic encouragement, and showing genuine interest in them and their art.

Brummer & Thorsborne(2021) recommend replacing disciplinary tactics used to shame with positive reinforcement, like encouragement. I also thought about how Danielle Signh shared with me her strategies for using conscious discipline which utilizes trauma-informed language

and focuses on de-escalating emotionally dysregulated children rather than enacting punitive disciplinary tactics to correct behaviors (Bailey, n.d.).

As a full-time teacher, I will strive to use such methods, in place of other commonplace shame-based disciplinary measures. If a measure like “calling down to the office” becomes necessary, I think that removing shame and fear from the phrase or having a plan with these students would be necessary, as not including children who frequently slip into highly elevated behaviors in their own de escalation plan, strips them of autonomy and voice, resulting in a practice that creates hierarchical power imbalances in schools, which, of course, is decidedly un-trauma informed.

Depending on how students personally respond to experiencing shame, whether that is fight, flight, freeze, or fawn, their behavior may become a vicious cycle of challenging behavior, like “fight”, for instance, if it is continuously followed by shame based discipline.

While I do not believe it was expressly needed at any point, I believe if Jocelyn and I enact this as a consequence without discussing it with any of the boys first, it will perpetuate an incredibly harmful cycle of shame and exclusion that occurs within schools. Ayre, & Krishnamoorthy, (2020) mentions that children who frequently slip into highly elevated behaviors should also be included in the planning process for their deescalation plan. Removing them from this choice strips them of autonomy and voice, resulting in a practice that creates hierarchical power imbalances between schools, which, of course, is decidedly un-trauma informed (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy 2020).

For instance, depending on how students personally respond to experiencing shame (whether that is fight, flight, freeze, or fawn) their behavior may become a vicious cycle of challenging behavior, like “fight”, for instance, if it is continuously followed by shame based

discipline. I believe that dismantling these seemingly innocuous but prevalent shaming tactics will prove crucial if we are to create environments that are truly trauma informed.

Earlier in the week, the after school program coordinator identified a black neurodivergent student as having “behavioral challenges” such as “tattling” on his peers. I have never had any challenges with this student other than redirecting him back to his seat, redirecting chromebook usage, or occasionally, finding the real “need” behind the “tattling” -which was usually just the need to be acknowledged and listened to. That being said, I only witnessed a few instances of this behavior and all were easily redirected by hearing him out and communicating with him about his concern, and redirecting his attention to another activity. This class period, however, there was an incident when one of this student’s white peers (who tried to switch boxes with him at the beginning of the class), announced to the class that he was offended by the student’s utterance of “what the freak?”. Later, this same student shouted at the neurodivergent student for “getting paint in his hair” when the student walked past him (the student did not get paint in his hair). During these instances, this student was seen as “overacting” by his peers . Another black student attempted to helpfully interject to the black neurodivergent student “remember how our teacher always tells you to calm down?”. At her words, he visibly tried to bottle up the hurt he felt.

Though these incidents, (while brief, and while Jocelyn and I were quick to verify the facts, de-escalate and/or redirect the conversation, emphasizing the importance of respecting peers and respectful communication), I find the expectation that he, as black, neurodivergent student, is required to remedy emotionally charged situations.

Is no one willing to accommodate him? Must he always accommodate everyone else? It is unfortunate that I was not able to 100% make this a comfortable space for him, given that he is

one of the most vulnerable students. It is often the case that marginalized individuals do the emotional labor and feel less secure in spaces than more privileged individuals. They are expected to “manage other people’s emotions and social expectations” which “typically results in the laborer’s own emotional experience being disregarded and thwarted by this lack of respect and consideration” (Wong, 2019, p.?). I did make an effort to keep an eye on this student, checking in on him and his process. I was glad to see that, at the end of class, he felt brave enough to volunteer to share his work (it was his first time sharing!). He engaged with everyone, asking, “before I show you, can anyone guess what’s inside of this?”. He received a few curious responses, before revealing his creation.

I did feel reassured however, when Jocelyn mentioned that a teacher from the second week briefly popped into the class and told Jocelyn that the student might need a bit of guidance. Apparently, she mentioned that we can seek her out if we need assistance talking with him. Luckily, this student was very talkative during the programs so we did not get to take advantage of her assistance, but knowledge of this offer assures me that he receives tailored support during the day from individuals that are patient and non judgemental.

When I compare this to the after school coordinator’s friendly warning about his tendency to “tattle”, I understand that her warning came from a good place. However, I also feel that sometimes, when considering student behavior, it is important to reframe it as an unmet need. While it *is* necessary to help a child learn conflict resolution skills and productive communication, I believe that it is important for educators to understand where a need like this originates so that we may understand where the need originates and guide them to overcome these skills . “Tattling” stems from a desire to be validated and acknowledged: to be heard. Offering students, especially students who need special assistance during the day, the guidance

and support that they require to learn the skills to support themselves, rather than meeting the behavior with judgment, seems much more productive.

In addition to needing a clear and consistent environment, it is necessary for educators to convey to students the importance of respect and safety in a classroom community which Jocelyn and I reinforced. Similarly, students must understand that they are part of a community where every student has intrinsic value, and that they are capable (and expected to) contribute and communicate safely and respectfully within that community. To students with this challenge, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of their contributions and their voice: that they will always belong and that they will always be welcome, even if they make a mistake.

However, it is particularly important for them to voice their needs and struggles to a teacher in a way that is respectful and safe. I tried my best to communicate this with the student today. If I were his longterm teacher, I would work on building more trust with him so that he feels comfortable opening up about his needs to prevent them from manifesting in the ways that they did today.

In the past, I have worked with kids who have been extremely reactive because they felt as if their voices did not matter. In my early days of knowing them, this manifested in them communicating their frustration in the only ways they knew how: through yelling or aggression. While this student's behavior was much less extreme, I believe that this boy should be able to know that his voice is important and will only be met with non-judgemental and supportive responses. While is not my intention to excuse his behavior but I am attempting to understand it. Boryga (2022) writes that in order to de-escalate situations and to build trust with more reactive students, educators can build trust by patiently addressing behaviors in a non-reactive manner, showing concern, centering the student rather than the behavior.

It is these systems that Brummer & Thorsborne(2021) refer to that create this trauma stemming from shame, rejection and isolation. No one is spared from the harm but the most vulnerable among us, those who carry diverse identities, bear the brunt of this trauma (Proctor, et al., 2020).

We as educators must try to be compassionate of our students and understand that every human behavior is driven by the pursuit of universal human needs (Glasser, 2020). We must remind students of their worth rather than shaming them. A behavioral “challenge” (however this manifests) is indicative of a need that is not being met. As educators, we may not know the specifics of this need, but we can build trust, have patience, compassion and offer support.

Maintaining consistent environment with clear expectations

On the topic of support, it became apparent during week two’s class that a consistent structure is crucial. These class agreements proved helpful during the class, as it established expectations for safety and respect. Additionally, students were able to contribute to and collaborate on this with their opinions and suggestions. However, it could have been more of a collaborative experience and could have been less unexpected if I had introduced it week one. That way, it would not have been as unexpected.

Furthermore, filling out the worksheet was a bit tedious for some students. The text was a tad intimidating for some children and a few needed help with the words and the process of coming up with a story in general. Some children who requested help had no problem with this step and were able to move on.

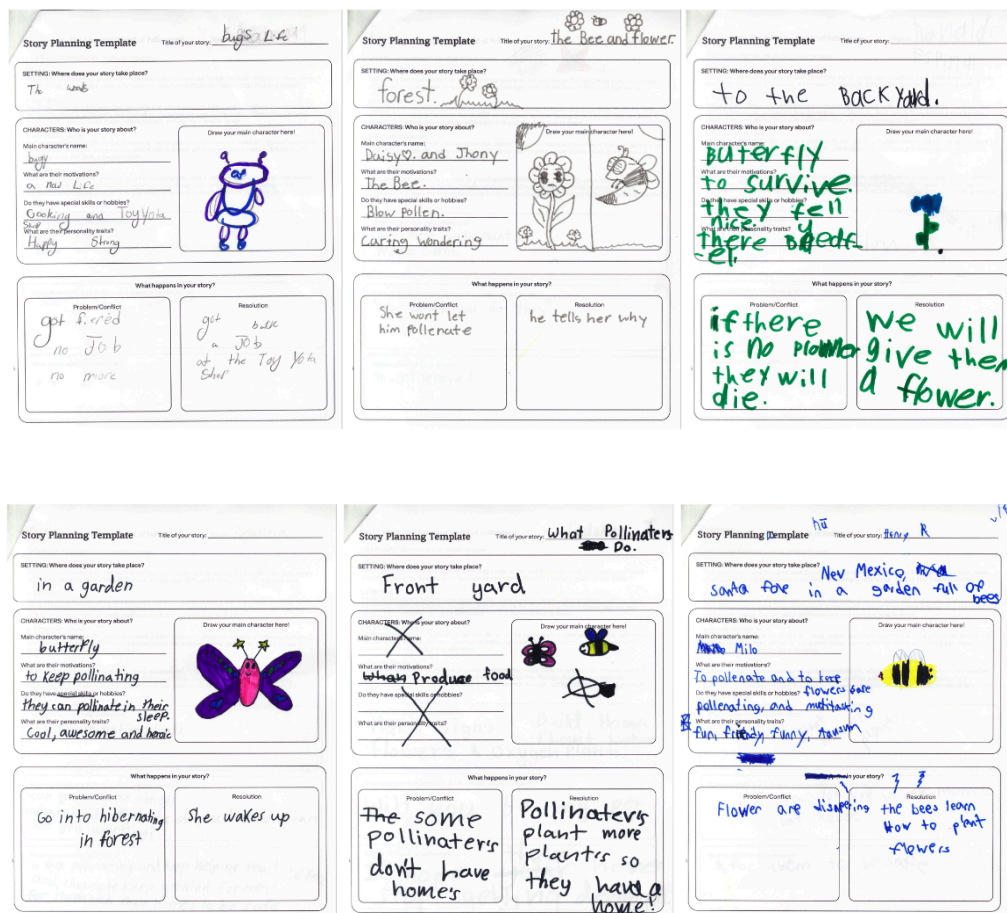


Figure 2.9 Student Art

However, by the time the second part of the activity could have been introduced (the book folding) a few children were distracted which led to the environment in general feeling a bit noisy and overstimulating. At this point, I believe that there could have been a whole class book folding demo for some more structure in this portion of class. Consistency, routine, and structure are important for emotional development and trauma-informed pedagogy (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021; Ayre & Krishnamoorthy 2020). I believe that the lack of consistency and structure in this class period, in addition to Jocelyn and I neglecting to remove stress from today's assignment (emphasizing that this worksheet was not for a grade, that the reading was

not necessary, and that the worksheet was intended to generate ideas for the main art-portion), might have left a few students feeling unmotivated.

While there were a number of students who worked the entire time and immediately got the lesson, there were those who tended to get distracted. I believe that during week two, students who were prone to distraction in the beginning of the class were either:

- a bit confused about the lesson (whether they were new to the class or because of the nature of week two's curriculum itself). These students were easily redirected and regained interest when given instructions a second time, given demos, or asked guiding questions. This sparked an interest in the topic and they proceeded to create their pollinator book.
- stuck on how to create their story. These students from constructive encouragement about their art, ideas and guiding questions or prompts that inspired them to continue. This bullet overlapped with bullet point three quite often!
- students that are full of very abstract ideas but need assistance with channeling their energy and/or executing their ideas. These students (while full of energy, imagination, or both!) benefit from being asked about their interests and how their interests can possibly tie in with their art-making process. They also benefit from having lots of material choices and prompts about how they can apply them!
During week three, it was beneficial to offer these students more choices in materials and agency while also offering them a more tailored approach in the beginning of the lesson.

Most of the class completed their work diligently while there were several students who became distracted falling into the above categories. Aside from building more trust with students in general, incorporating the emergent pedagogy methodology was very flexible in allowing me to adjust my approach when interacting with these students.

I suggested being intentional about supporting specific students who tend to get distracted early on, before checking in on the students who tended to start without challenges, offer more choices in terms of materials, like we did week one and formatting the hook to be more age-conscious in order to get their attention.

Establishing Trust Through Vulnerability

During week one, I aimed to be intentional about incorporating trauma informed elements into my teaching, finding the advice of Candy Gonzolez and Danielle Singh the most beneficial. Both educators emphasized that in order to be a truly effective trauma competent educator, one must first establish connection in order to build trust.

Jocelyn and I were intentional about building trust with the students. In the beginning of class one, we opened the class with an icebreaker to warm-up the space, asking about their names, their favorite grade levels, and their favorite desserts. We also introduced ourselves. I feel that the initial icebreaker, emphasizing process over progress, and removing the stress from the pollinator worksheet, for instance, offering them the agency to draw or write one or all of the questions on the pollinator drawing sheet, may have encouraged student participation. There were even a few students who got up to show us their work. Students became eager to share their knowledge and they also were not hesitant to share what they didn't know, especially after Jocelyn and I expressed our own vulnerability in not knowing how to operate the video on the

Smart Board. We adjusted the lesson plan to account for this technical difficulty but we expressed, when asked by the students, that we were also here learning!

During the collage making, I made sure to check in on every student, asking about the significance of their art and asking about their interests, which they were excited to share. Rinaldi (2001) suggests that when listening to students, educators not only pay attention to the words being spoken, but to the emotions and meaning underneath the language. Listening is honoring their experiences and attempting to truly comprehend what the other person needs . Through active listening in an art setting, we can build trust and establish connections through documenting a child's art in a manner that is nonjudgmental and organized in a way that tracks process, perspectives, and growth (Aden & Theodotou, 2019). This is considered a powerful form of vulnerability which creates a safe environment and encourages students to express their ideas without judgment (Rinaldi, 2001). I believe that Jocelyn and I documented well, as there were several students who were eager to volunteer and explain the significance of their art.

During the lesson, one child showed me the pages of his sketchbook after he was finished with his collage (shown below).



Figure 3.0 Student Art

He was very excited to share about how he had progressed from drawing objects to drawing faces. He asked if he could show me his sketchbook the next week and if he could show me the blending pencils that he liked using. Just like other students who showed or described

their art when asked, I made sure to thank him for letting me see the pages of his sketchbook. I have been working on incorporating gratitude, not just praise of student work into my vocabulary, whether that is thanking them for showing them their work or, at the end of the day, thanking them for working so hard. Brummer & Thorsborne (2021) say that educators can work on “gratitude rather than praise” as a trauma informed practice (p. 105).

Trauma Informed Intervention

About an hour into class on week two, a neurodivergent student (according to the after school coordinator), became distressed and withdrawn and had isolated herself towards a corner of the classroom. Jocelyn pointed out the behavior to me and I went over to check on her. She was removing dried glue from the caps of glue bottles as a self soothing activity. I engaged her in quiet conversation to understand her feelings. At first I thought it might’ve been about the assignment but it was about the likelihood of a storm (there had been one last night) due to the darkening clouds. Whether this is how larger anxieties were manifesting or this was just what she decided to tell me, we checked the weather on my phone together (she did not want to look at first, so I checked first and then we looked together after I told her it was only going to snow). I asked her what is a safe place for her when she is scared like this. She said that her home is with her mom who “gives her hugs and kisses”and “helps her with her anxiety”. I asked her if there is a way she can feel safe now and if she could bring some safety of her home here to school. She said that she would like to “draw Catnap but only with Posca [brand] markers”. Luckily, I had some Posca markers with me. I asked if she wanted to come with me back to her table and she agreed and she proceeded to draw quietly for the rest of the class, sharing her idea with another student who recognized the figure. This solution seemed ideal to me and seemed to align with

her needs. Researchers Ayre & Krishnamoorthy (2020) wrote about educators aiding students with dysregulation, specifically dissociation in the classroom.

When speaking with one of the after-school coordinators later, Jocelyn and I discovered that this is “normal” behavior for the student. The Afterschool Coordinator described the student as being “sensitive” and characterized her and another student as being “on the spectrum”. In my discussion with this girl, using language such as “Where do you feel the safest?”, “Is there any way we can help you bring some of that place with you to school?”, “Is there any way that you can bring your safe place here with you to school?”, was very helpful in helping her to regulate her anxiety (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy, 2020.). I am glad that she was able to open up to me so that we could work through this together.

Additionally, the researcher posits that allowing the child to quietly go to a “designated safe space” within the classroom or engaging in a separate, grounding activity can help regulate their emotions as well (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy, 2020, p.?). In an art education space, this could be a corner or a table with drawing or sensory material corner. While I am not sure what exact triggered this moment of anxiety, whether it was the overstimulating noise of the classroom, the assignment itself, the idea of facing storm away from the safety of her home, or a combination of all of these things, I am glad that this student found a way to regulate their emotions by returning to their seat to draw her favorite character.



*Figure 3.1 Student Art***Building Trust and Observing Student's at Work**

A number of students put their own unique spin on the pollinator book prompt for this week, depicting wonderfully creative stories! For instance, the student who allowed me to see the pages of his sketchbook during week one, brought his favorite sketchbook in for week two as well. A “knight” character that he often draws, ultimately became the focus of his story. Even though this wasn't explicitly about pollinators, I was glad to see that he was hard at work using choice and collaborating with classmates. In a way, he was able to still tie it into the pollinator lesson by integrating his special character into not one, but two of the stories of the classmates that he befriended during the art class.

His tablemate, who used his character, wrote

“Once there was a bee named Milo who loved pollinating flowers! He had a best friend named Butterfly. Where Milo lived it was very hot and there were enough flowers to last 2 lifetimes. But then flowers started disappearing, so Butterfly and Milo tried to learn to plant flowers from Jake. Milo and Butterfly thanked Jake and planted seeds and told other bees” (student work, 2024).

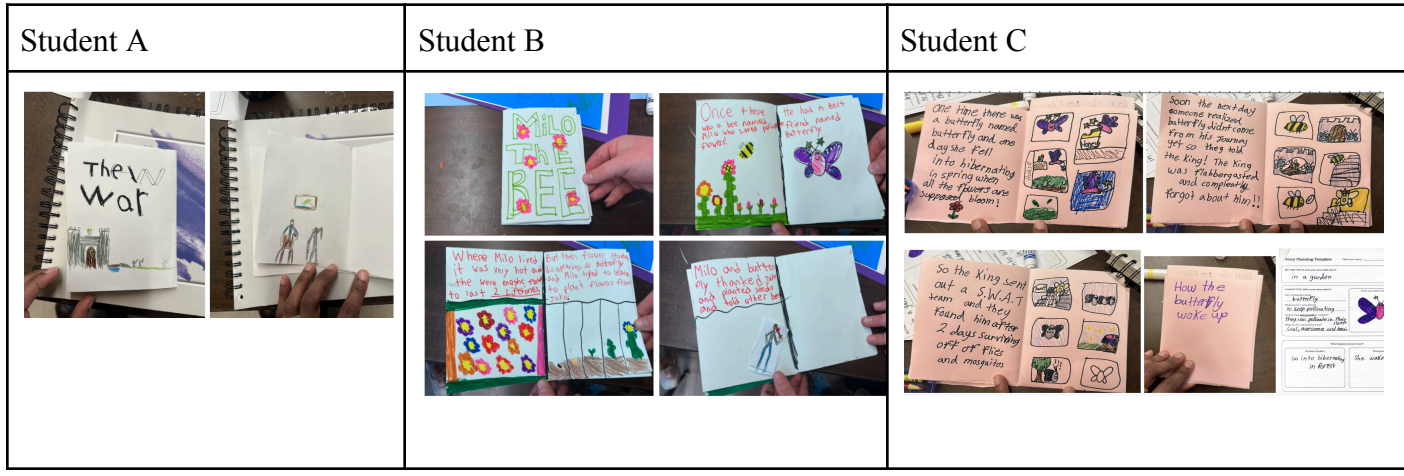


Figure 3.2 Student Art- An unexpected instance of student collaboration! The butterfly is student C's character and "Jake" the cut-out knight, is student A's character!



Figure 3.3 Student Art

One student who was quiet and reserved during week one, was more upbeat during week two and chose to work in community with her peers, rather than choosing to sit alone. I was glad

that she found a sense of belonging. Inspired by the works of Brown (year) and bell hooks (year), the Sacred Design Lab (2023), states that **belonging** changes the way we show up, stimulating feelings of compassion and joy, while diminishing anxiety, loneliness, and fear. By engaging with the people around us in meaningful ways, we can also begin to know ourselves and overcome the shame that separates us. It is indeed a powerful need that is crucial for survival and sparks a sense of power in oneself (Glasser, 2020).

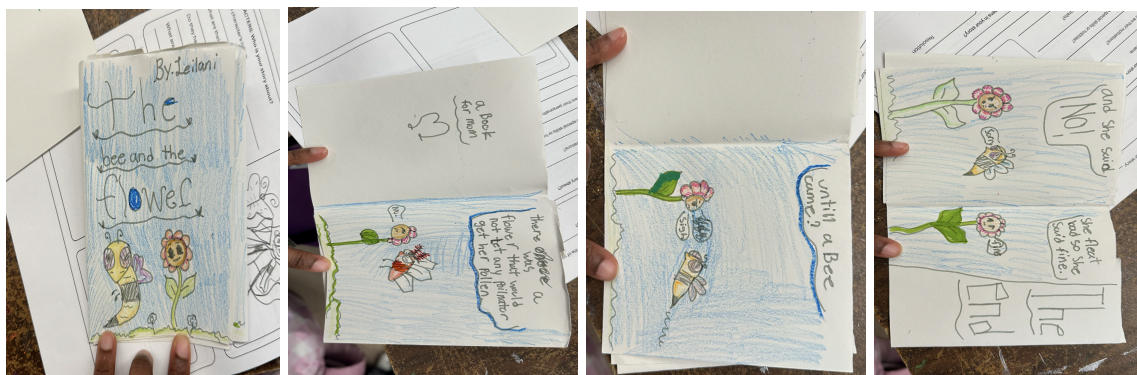


Figure 3.4 Student Art

This student shared how much she was enjoying herself a lot and asked if there could be more programs after the next week or even next year when she's in fifth grade. I am glad to see that

Overall, though week two was a bit busy at some points, it was another fun class with lovely art! I loved hearing everyone's ideas, from one student who made a book about a bee who turned a parking garage into a forest or another student who made a book about a butterfly who fell into hibernation, only to wake up again!

By week three, Jocelyn and I were happy to find that we had a number of students who were excited to share time during the allotted presentation time. We had five new sharers this week, three of whom had historically been quiet during class. We had many instances of students encouraging each other during work-time (overheard by teachers). Something that I found

notable during week three was peer encouragement. While it might have been present in other weeks. It was very heartwarming to overhear it taking place so casually during work and share time.

A table of three girls in the back quietly discussing each other's work.

Friend 1: “[name of friend], I love yours!”

Friend 2: “Thank you!”

Friend 3: “Do you like mine?”

Friend 1: “Yes, I love yours too!”



Figure 3.5 Student Art

They then began to discuss their process of how they made each of theirs

During presentation time (though there were a few side conversations happening during presentation time as well, the encouragement from the peer audience was also new, surprising, and very welcome!).

“Woah, that’s so cool!”

“Oo nice!”

Another student, the student responsible for the minecraft penguin and the cylinder book, created a beehive for the bees to rest like grass and stones. It included the honey that they made. This student was incredibly inattentive and restless during week two but showed stark

improvement in interest during week three. When I commented on all of the hard work that he put in, he was uncertain about whether his art was “good” but received enthusiastic encouragement from the peers at his table. “He thinks it’s not good but I keep telling him that it’s really good!”, one classmate commented.



Figure 3.6 Student Art

During week three, Jocelyn and I also had more sharers during presentation time. I am very glad that we had new students that felt brave enough to share with the class! After learning about our artist and the core of her work as an artist and scientist, that surrounds the concept “gardening with empathy”, several students had the chance to share “how they use empathy in their own lives”. Student answers included:

“If my friend falls off his bike, I will get off my bike to help him”

“If my friend gets hurt, I don’t laugh at them”

Within the context of this class, we had students share that in order to use empathy to consider pollinators when making a garden. A few student answers included:

“make them [pollinators] happy”

“be considerate”

“Not pick the flowers while they [pollinators] are trying to pollinate it”

Willcox (2017) speaks about psychologically safe spaces, explaining that if students feel empowered in a space, meaning that if they feel compelled to create, respond, and present in some way, it increases the likelihood of them genuinely participating in the art and repeating the emotional benefits as well. It allows for a certain vulnerability, like presenting your work in front of your peers and teachers for the very first time. Not only that, by incorporating formal mindfulness in art education classrooms, such as showing a genuine interest in student artwork, planning lessons surrounding reconstruction and deconstruction art (such as hands-on art), or emphasizing an environment where mistakes are *ok* (Dunn-Snow & D’Amelio, 2000.), informal mindfulness begins to happen naturally. Informal mindfulness behaviors include vulnerability, empathetic listening, and being attuned to others and ourselves (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021, p. 91). When we begin to adopt a mindful outlook, we can also experience self compassion, emotional regulation, and a non-judgemental acceptance of the present moment which can lead to a reduction in shame. I think that it is important to note that “safe” and “brave” spaces work in tandem with each other. Safe spaces provide the groundwork for building trust while brave spaces are significant in producing growth. I found it so powerful that we had several new sharers today, and watched the safe space that we’ve been trying to model merged with a brave one with student’s push towards communication and equitable participation.



Figure 3.7 Student Art

I have often thought about the words of Danielle Signh who said that the trauma informed nature of her work as an art teacher would have been impossible to achieve without also working together with a community of other trauma informed art teachers, social workers, and behavior specialists within the school. I also believe that a community of individuals working together is integral for these spaces to work. After all, by being vulnerable, building trust amongst ourselves, and learning to collaborate as new educators, Jocelyn and I were able to begin building a space that emphasized the safety and respect of the students inside.

Reeves (2019) acknowledged that while art education is capable of transforming a classroom for the better, art educators must rely on each other, given that institutions themselves are not always supportive. Ayre & Krishnamoorthy (2020) also discussed creating action plans with fellow educators and relying on fellow staff. What would be additionally helpful, are trauma related support from institutions, such as preparation programs, trained counselors within the

school, additional art educators to prevent burnout, or even teacher wellness programs like “de-stressing collaboratively in afterschool yoga or Pilates (Reeves 2019). Despite studying different aspects of this class Jocelyn and I were still able to collaborate on these lesson plans for the students of Norwood Elementary and were invited back for the remaining school year.

It saddened me to learn that the theater and arts programs, similar to the situation at Danielle Signh’s school, is funded by a grant that will no longer be supported in the following year. The after school coordinator mentioned that she too was saddened by the removal of this program, especially when so many children gained fulfilling benefits from these extracurricular activities.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I investigate and answer what role art education plays in promoting healing, cooperation, healthy communication, gratitude, and embracing imperfection. I look into how art educators enhance the social-emotional and healing nature of their practice by incorporating trauma-informed components. Furthermore, I ask what we can do as educators to navigate challenges that arise from student trauma within educational systems that perpetuate hierarchical and oppressive patterns. Lastly, I question how educational spaces can be transformed from places of oppression that retraumatize students into spaces of healing that empower them to be their best selves.

By using emergent pedagogy as a methodology, I organized my findings into five themes that emerged over the course of three weeks, such as: student agency, establishing trust through vulnerability, challenging shame based structures, maintaining a consistent environment, and removing stress. These themes, which all emerge in trauma informed pedagogy (Vandillen, 2020) demonstrate why incorporating trauma informed instruction into educational environments is

necessary for both the students and educators. This is necessary in order for all students to reap the social emotional benefits of art-education.

I believe that educators have the opportunity to understand how trauma works not only in the mind but through the ways trauma is ingrained in societal systems and institutions. We can be compassionate and supportive of students by having an awareness of how all of our students are impacted. When we are cognizant and respond to our student's diverse needs, the classroom becomes more trauma informed and students can benefit from the social emotional learning of the art.

Art education plays a significant role in promoting healing by providing opportunities for self-expression, fostering cooperation and healthy communication, cultivating gratitude, and encouraging acceptance of imperfection. Through art, students can explore their emotions, connect with others, and develop resilience in navigating life's challenges. Art educators can enhance the social-emotional and healing nature of our practice by incorporating trauma-informed components by creating safe and trusting environments that promote vulnerability and connection through art, integrating SEL practices that recognize and respond to student needs. Systemic reform, for example, will lead to long term change, like having more tools that support teachers as we support students (and our own) emotional needs.

We can advocate for systemic changes, or trauma-informed practices, and rely on one another to initiate transformative approaches, and create inclusive environments that challenge these oppressive patterns.

In order to dismantle this harmful, shame-based system that continually re-traumatizes the students who come into educational spaces, we need to recognize that trauma impacts everyone at all levels, at every intersection, while paying extra attention to those that are the

most vulnerable. When we are able to sow the seeds of trauma-informed aspects into our work, our communities can grow and thrive in ways that are loving, connected, and free, transforming our safe spaces into brave ones.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Norwood Elementary Lesson Plan

week one

Mini Makerz Art Studio Planning Document week one

Brief Project Description:

- We will be learning about local pollinators in Rhode Island and threats to their population through a presentation, a short discussion, and collage activity.

Activity Details:

- Presentation (Jocelyn will present on Pollinators,

Artist: Faith Williams (Kaitlyn and Jocelyn will present artist)

Faith Williams is an artist who makes work about the biodiversity and vulnerability of pollinators and our connections to them!

- She uses mixed media to study pollinators!
- **Kind of like us**, she wants to learn more about them and understand the environmental issues that put them at risk
- She has to get to know them in order to learn information about them!



Cyclical Forces, 2021



At the Verge, 2020

- Short discussion (Kaitlyn will lead discussion)
 - What did you find the most interesting from the presentation?
 - Is there something new that you learned? Or did you already know something about pollinators before this?
 - What do you think we can do to help pollinators?
 - How did this make you feel?

 - As kids move into the room, we will pass out a worksheet for them to track their ideas and thoughts/things they found interesting during the presentation with words or images.

- Kaitlyn will show a demo “I made my pollinator collage on bees because without bees...”



Activity

- We will break off into tables. There will be 5 Pollinator Tables - each table will have images and scanned pages from books of common pollinators (alternatively, materials will be categorized accordingly and placed on one table)
 - Butterfly
 - Bee
 - Birds
 - Bats
 - Flies
- Every student will choose a table and be asked to make a collage, thinking about the collage making as a way of gathering info about the pollinator at their table. As you're making your collage, think about what aspects about pollinators you want to highlight through your collage.
 - What is a pollinator? (highlighting the animal, life cycle, etc)
 - How does pollination happen? (process)
 - Where do pollinators live?
 - What plants depend on pollinators?
 - Why are they important to other living things including you and me? How do they help us get our food?
 - How are pollinators connected to the larger ecosystem that we live in?

Materials:

- Paper, colorful paper
- scissors
- Markers
- Magazines/pictures
- Paint, water, brushes
- Printed materials
- glue

Timeline

- 3:15 PM - 3:20 PM: introductions and icebreaker: what is your favorite dessert?
- 3:20 PM - 3:35 PM: pollinator presentation
- 3:35 PM - 3:45 PM: artist and project intro
- 3:45 PM - 4:35 PM: activity
- 4:35 PM - 4:45 PM: closure (ask kids if they want to share about their work, photograph artwork, collect worksheets, introduce next week's project)

week two

Mini Makerz Art Studio Planning Document week two

Brief Project Description:

- We will be learning about how we can use visual storytelling to share about the importance/impact of pollinators through their perspective.

Activity Details:

- Kaitlyn will start with class agreements
- Jocelyn will go over recap and worksheet to fill out to plan their story and create their pollinator character. – create a story about something that you would want someone else to know about pollinators
 - Who remembers what we talked about last week?
 - Why are pollinators in trouble?
 - How can we help pollinators?
 - ~~*Pretend you are a pollinator. What would you want to say to a human if you could talk?*~~
 - *What's one thing you'd like to know about this animal about its life?*
 - *What's your wish/question for that animal?*
 - *What are your worries for that animal?*
 - Who is your character? (human/pollinator/flowers/objects?)
 - What does your character look like?
 - How does your character talk/move?
 - What is your character's motivation? (e.g. to help their family and friends, to help the plants, to provide food for other living things)
 - Are there any other characters in the story?
 - What is the setting of the story?
 - Conflict/resolution
 - Beginning/middle/end
- Jocelyn will give a demo on how to make a magic zine – the kids can design a front/back cover and have 3 spreads/6 pages for their story.

fold into eighths
and cut red
line in center

open center

A magic zine!

Materials:

- White Paper and colorful paper
- Scissors
- Drawing/coloring materials: Pencils, markers, colored pencils, crayons
- Magazines and collage materials from last week?

Timeline

- 3:15 PM - 3:25 PM: introductions (what is your favorite type of pollinator? / do you know what a pollinator is?) + housekeeping rules (class agreements!)
 - -pass out planning docs
- 3:25 PM - 3:45 PM: recap of last week + story planning (write stuff on the board?)
- 3:45 PM - 3:50 PM: magic zine demo (they can continue planning their story after if they want to, but remind them that there's limited time and it would be better to work on the actual book!)
- 3:50 PM - 4:30 PM: story writing/drawing time! (remember to take pictures of process)
- 4:30 PM - 4:45 PM: closure (ask for volunteers to share their story, photograph artwork, collect worksheets, introduce next week's project)

week three

Mini Makerz Art Studio Planning Document week three

Brief Project Description:

- We will relate the importance of a garden tended to with empathy by allowing the children to create dioramas.

Activity Details:

- Kaitlyn will present on the artist Dr Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg and Jocelyn will present information that is essential for pollinator survival in a garden. With this information. Students can create gardening with empathy drawings!
- Kaitlyn will lead a discussion about empathy and what it means to garden with empathy
 - *What is Empathy, how do you practice it in your own lives, and how can you create a garden considering the perspective of a pollinator?*

Artist: Dr. Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg

- from the UK, created a website (Project Pathmaker) where she can create digital artworks for pollinators. She arranges plants based on what pollinators need rather than what humans want to see!
- Pollinators are at risk without native plants in gardens. Does anyone remember why?
- By creating these online gardens, she's able to inspire others to create these really beautiful and really healthy gardens that help pollinators survive.
- This is related to this idea of empathy
- Empathy is showing kindness to and thinking about someone or something other than ourselves! It is trying your best to understand someone else.
- Do you know of some ways that we can show empathy?
- She thinks of pollinators using empathy, looking at a garden through the eyes of a pollinator
- She challenges us to look at gardening designed from a pollinator's point of view, rather than our point of view.
- A garden designed for pollinators would look very different than we would arrange it. We might arrange it based on what looks the most beautiful, while they might arrange it based on what they need to survive in a garden





Activity Details:

- 3:15-3:20 icebreaker (Introductions and icebreakers) What is your favorite place in nature?)
 - We will recap the last two weeks for the children who were not there,
- 3:25-3:40 presentation
 - Kaitlyn will lead a discussion about gardening with empathy after kids do a drawing brainstorm sheet
- 3:40-3:45 Kaitlyn will show a demo (seen below) and will go over the activity + Introduction to Materials!
- 3:45- 4:30 Activity Time !
- 4:30 - 4:45: closure (ask for volunteers to share their story, photograph artwork, collect worksheets, introduce next week's project)



Materials:

- Fake plants
- boxes
- Tacky Glue
- Scissors
- Paper and newspaper
- Bees, butterflies, and flowers
- Paper
- Paint and water
- Tiny rocks
- Fabric
- Newspaper
- clay

Appendix B

Norwood Elementary Notes

week one Personal Reflection/Notes

Agency: Student Choice & Voice

Jocelyn and I attempted to create an optimal space for art-making that would show all of the materials and encourage the students with the possibilities prior to their art project. There was a (a bee table, a butterfly table, a flowerfly table, and a bat table) and a choice at which table to sit at. We tried to also set up the supplies in a way that was hopefully appealing and exciting, with many options to choose from.



When they began, we asked if we could take photos of their work in art as we went around. I asked if I could take photos of their art and then asked about their ideas for the project to which they were eager to discuss. Students were given the choice to draw or write their responses

In addition to asking students about their wonderfully unique and innovative artistic choices, One student had an interest in minecraft and we talked about how he incorporated a Minecraft portal into his pollinator image.



I am glad to see that students are incorporating their own ideas into the lesson. Though this is not expressly a pollinator, this is still a highly creative design. Other students, after telling me a bit about the choices they had made in their art, told me their favorite songs that I would add to the queue (we had music playing at a reasonable volume).

Removing Stress

Following a presentation where Jocelyn led an interactive presentation about pollinators, I led a discussion about the artist Faith Williams who makes work about the biodiversity and vulnerability of pollinators and our connections to them. Prior to passing out this worksheet. Jocelyn and I emphasized that there was no right or wrong way to complete the worksheets: that

they could write or draw, they could complete one or all of the prompts, as long as they generated some ideas for the collage that would follow!

Part of trauma-informed pedagogy states that an individual is more likely to have trauma than not, and that educators can consider how closely linked trauma is with shame. For children, who are still shaping their identities, who may already have it embedded in their psyche, the school environment can be a breeding ground for shame (Dolezal and Gibson, 2022) All educators understand a student's need for connection, love, and belonging and address these needs with patience and compassion in order to create a safe environment. Understanding behavioral challenges that stem from trauma as trauma responses is helpful for adopting a compassionate approach, as is remembering that compassion is necessary for human survival (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021).

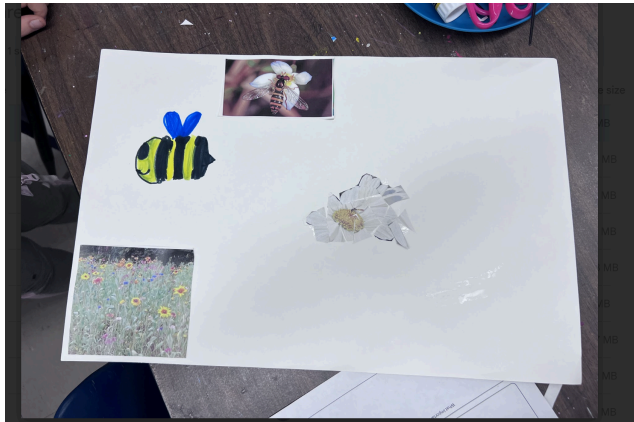
Jocelyn and I were vocal about creating this safe space removing high risk aspects away from the collage project as a whole and we were verbal about it during our teaching, emphasizing growth rather than performance. We were upfront and transparent with performance. There were however, other students who needed support in other ways that I will remember to account for next week by incorporating more tailored approaches as I walk around and check in on individual processes.

This week, it is important to keep in mind that the goal of trauma informed pedagogy is not to diagnose. Rather, it is to be informed, to notice and to respond. Being trauma informed is assuming that trauma is prevalent and treating people in a way that reflects this understanding.

The words from Candy Gonzalez, trauma informed educator, come to mind. In my discussion with them, they emphasized how schooling systems are harmful colonial structures

that perpetuate trauma. I could notice evidence of this anxiety in the way that some students were hesitant to trust in their own artistic process, a testament to shame's firm grasp.

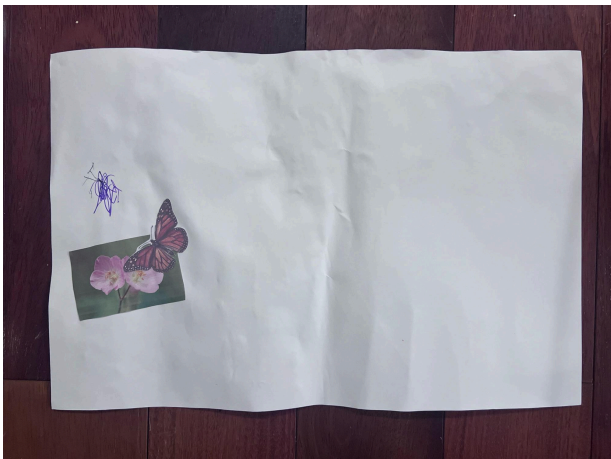
One student grew increasingly frustrated with herself when she couldn't create a mosaic (similar to the mosaic that I had created as a demo) stating that it was "too hard" to arrange it how she wanted. I worked with her to first arrange it in a pattern that was to her liking before she glued the several pieces on at a time. After this step, I also told her that it was alright if hers looked any kind of way, attempting to vocally soothe some of her worries about creating a design that was not "correct". I told her that collages can incorporate a number of different kinds of pictures: whether they are stacked on top of each other or arranged side by side. She eventually began to add larger pictures to her collage and even a drawing to her collage while also making deliberate choices pertaining to the lesson.



On the other hand, there were students who were not shy or "self critical" at least not at first glance. One girl was very vocal during the presentation and had a wealth of ideas during art time. In retrospect, I believe that she simply needs more structure. She has many big ideas and even started making a picture of Jocelyn and I talking to butterflies at one point



She started piling supplies onto her table, getting caught up in the colors and textures of what she wanted the final product to look like. At the end of class, she became very sad and apologetic that she was not able to finish her project.

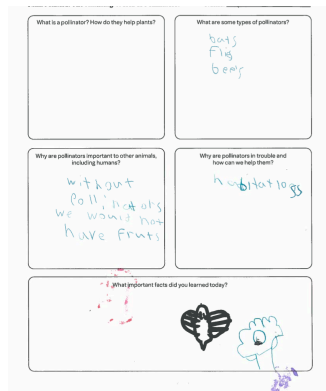


I expressed to her that it was completely okay and that she was not in trouble! I told her that she had a lovely start, that the beauty of art is that we do not always finish and that we can always add onto it, especially colleges because they use lots and lots of layers! I told her that we could work together next week on her art. She seemed reassured that she would either be able to finish next time or create something new! There is room for improvement in next week's class to

change the environment in support of the most vulnerable people in the room. I believe that she and another student, who began using a chrome book near the end of class when he was finished, can use a bit more tailored support!

Jocelyn and I emphasized that while the lesson is based on what interesting facts they learn, this was an opportunity for them to gather ideas, explore the art and explore the information that we learned about. In order to reduce overall stress, we let them know from the beginning that the class was not graded. I believe that we were successful in this area, as shown in the beginning and the end of the lesson for example. Students were free to answer one or all of the questions on the fact finding “worksheet”





Vulnerability and Trust Building

While incorporating trauma informed elements into my teaching, I found the advice of Candy Gonzalez and Danielle Singh the most beneficial. Both educators mentioned that in order to be a truly effective trauma competent educator, one must first establish connection in order to build trust). We opened the class with an icebreaker to get to know the students.

I believe that by incorporating this introduction, Jocelyn and I created a space of vulnerability and trust. During the presentation, they were eager to share their knowledge and they also were not hesitant to share what they didn't know. They shared what they had learned and there were a few of the students who jumped up and showed us their work! In addition to their interest in the subject itself, I feel that the initial icebreaker, emphasizing process over progress, and the agency to draw or write one or all of the questions on the pollinator drawing sheet, is what encouraged their participation.

During the lesson, I made sure to check in on every student, asking about the significance of their art and asking about their interests, which they were excited to share. Listening is honoring their experiences and attempting to truly comprehend what the other person needs (Rinaldi 2001). Through active listening in an art setting, we can build trust and establish connections through documenting a child's art in a manner that is nonjudgmental and organized in a way that tracks process, perspectives, and growth (Aden & Theodotou, 2019). This is

considered a powerful form of vulnerability which creates a safe environment and encourages students to express their ideas without judgment (Rinaldi 2001). I believe that Jocelyn and I documented well, as there were several students who were eager to volunteer and explain the significance of their art.

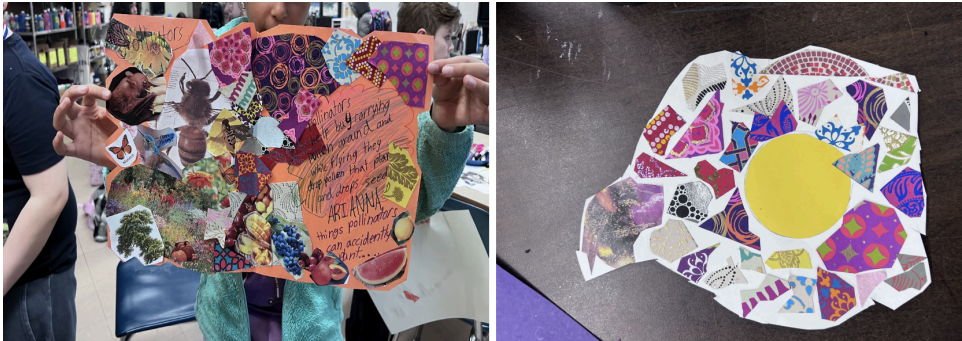
During the lesson, one child showed me the pages of his sketchbook after he was finished with his collage (shown below).



He was very excited to share about how he had progressed from drawing objects to drawing faces. He asked if he could show me his sketchbook the next week and if he could show me the blending pencils that he liked using. Just like other students who showed or described their art when asked, I made sure to thank him for letting me see the pages of his sketchbook. I have been working on incorporating gratitude, not just praise of student work into my vocabulary, whether that is thanking them for showing them their work or, at the end of the day, thanking them for working so hard. Brummer & Thorsborne(2021) say that educators can work on “gratitude rather than praise” as a trauma informed practice (p. 105).

One student demonstrated a thorough understanding of the content in her collage and was very enthusiastic about applying images! Another student (left) expressed uncertainty about his

choice to cover the yellow center of his “flower”, but was excited when told that his choice actually was a wonderful example of how colleges can employ techniques like layering!



Here are other lovely examples of student work!



Addressing Behavior: Challenging Shame Based Structures

There were a few reminders needed to “please respect our peers' voices” while they were sharing about their artwork and also a few reminders needed to help during cleanup to keep our artspace tidy to respect everyone’s time.

This reminds me that I should engage the class in a “class agreement” activity before week two’s class. I am thinking about but making sure to covering topics such as

- Respecting our peers
 - Using respectful language and using listening ears
- Respecting the art space
 - Helping during cleanup
 - Taking care of the materials
- Respecting our own art time
 - This is your time to have fun with art.
 - There is no wrong. Just try your best
 - don’t hesitate to ask for help!

The student who was using his chromebook towards the end -using did help with clean-up. When he asked if he could use it again next week, I expressed that just like there is a time for art and a time for clean-up, there is a separate time for chrome books, and that this time that we have together is not a time for chromebooks. I thanked him for all of the hard work that he put in and for helping clean. Though the class was able to hear the song he requested in the beginning, I regretfully didn’t get to know him as well this week, but I will get to know him better next time and see how I can tailor an approach to understand him better and try to understand what really interests him. He still made lovely art however and seemed keen on using butterflies on a green background!



For the most part, the kids were super engaged in the project and learning! They all made interesting and unique art that incorporated their knowledge of the lesson and their own wonderful ideas! I am so proud of their hard work and I am so excited for the next class. I am looking forward to getting to know all of the students more as we work on week two (story-telling!). I am also eager to see how tailoring approaches works towards students who may need a bit extra attention during the lesson. I am also interested in setting up some class agreements that we will all collaborate on before the lesson (the teachers and the students).

week two Personal Reflection/Notes

Addressing Behavior: Challenging Shame Based Structures:

using positive reinforcement and agency rather than punishing discipline.

We began the class with a class agreement. I emphasized that we did a good job with the following last week and I thanked them for...

- Respecting our peers
 - Using respectful language and using listening ears
- Respecting the art space

- Helping during cleanup
- Taking care of the materials
- Respecting our own art time
 - This is your time to have fun with art.
 - There is no wrong. Just try your best. Your ideas are super important!
 - don't hesitate to ask for help!

I asked them what they thought about these, and made sure to receive and write down feedback. I asked them what they thought of the agreements and if they wanted to add any. It was something that every student can participate in on a volunteer basis. Once we wrapped up, I told them they were always welcome to come up with me or Ms. Jocelyn if they want to add or discuss the agreements, or if they need any help! This class got a little busy during some portions but an occasional verbal reminder class of their agreements as well as walking over for a check-in on the table was beneficial in drawing everybody's focus back in. Positive reinforcement through encouragement was also helpful. I was very intentional about keeping accusation or blame out of my words, I made sure that my words were more future. "Growth", and community, focused, emphasizing and questioning how we could move forward as a community when considering what a safe and respectful classroom looks like.


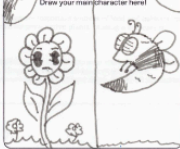

My goal with introducing these at the beginning of this class was to establish, together, agreements that we collaborate on and, in the future, honor as a class.

Having Consistent structure & Clear expectations

On the topic of "redirection", I also think that it's fair to say that Jocelyn and I need a more compelling hook and a more consistent structure for the next class in general. Though the first class was time sensitive, I do believe that I could have introduced the class agreements at the

beginning of week one, so that we could have all come up with them together as a way to give the students more of a choice & voice. Not to mention, even though I made sure to mention things like “we didn’t have any problems with this last week” and “thank you guys for doing so well with this last week”, or “what do you guys think about this agreement?” to avoid shaming the class and opening up avenues for discussion, it is possible that initiating the class agreement discussion the second week led to some confusion, took away agency, and felt like a lecture. Though these class agreements proved helpful today as a redirection method and students also got to contribute to and collaborate on this with their opinions and suggestions, it could have been more of a collaborative experience and could have been less unexpected if I had considered the timing of it earlier.

Furthermore, filling out the worksheet was a bit tedious for some students. The text was a tad intimidating for some children and a few needed help with the words and the process of coming up with a story in general. Some children who requested help had no problem with this step and were able to move on.

<p>Story Planning Template</p> <p>Title of your story: <u>bugs Life!</u></p>	<p>Story Planning Template</p> <p>Title of your story: <u>the Bee and flower.</u></p>	<p>Story Planning Template</p> <p>Title of your story: _____</p>												
<p>SETTING: Where does your story take place?</p> <p><u>The woods</u></p>	<p>SETTING: Where does your story take place?</p> <p><u>forest.</u></p>	<p>SETTING: Where does your story take place?</p> <p><u>to the Back Yard.</u></p>												
<p>CHARACTERS: Who is your story about?</p> <p>Main character's name: <u>bug</u></p> <p>What are their motivations? <u>on New Life</u></p> <p>Do they have special skills or hobbies? <u>Cooking and Toy Yota</u></p> <p>What are their personality traits? <u>Happy Strong</u></p> <p>Draw your main character here!</p> 	<p>CHARACTERS: Who is your story about?</p> <p>Main character's name: <u>Daisy and Jhon</u></p> <p>What are their motivations? <u>The Bee.</u></p> <p>Do they have special skills or hobbies? <u>Blow Pollen.</u></p> <p>What are their personality traits? <u>Caring Wandering</u></p> <p>Draw your main character here!</p> 	<p>CHARACTERS: Who is your story about?</p> <p>Main character's name: <u>BUTTERFLY</u></p> <p>What are their motivations? <u>to survive.</u></p> <p>Do they have special skills or hobbies? <u>they fell</u></p> <p>What are their personality traits? <u>nice y there sheds</u></p> <p>Draw your main character here!</p> 												
<p>What happens in your story?</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Problem/Conflict</th> <th>Resolution</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><u>got fired no Job no more</u></td> <td><u>got back a Job at the Toy Yota Shop</u></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Problem/Conflict	Resolution	<u>got fired no Job no more</u>	<u>got back a Job at the Toy Yota Shop</u>	<p>What happens in your story?</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Problem/Conflict</th> <th>Resolution</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><u>She wont let him pollenate</u></td> <td><u>he tells her why</u></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Problem/Conflict	Resolution	<u>She wont let him pollenate</u>	<u>he tells her why</u>	<p>What happens in your story?</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Problem/Conflict</th> <th>Resolution</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><u>if there is no planer they will die.</u></td> <td><u>We will give them a flower.</u></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Problem/Conflict	Resolution	<u>if there is no planer they will die.</u>	<u>We will give them a flower.</u>
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Problem/Conflict	Resolution													
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Story Planning Template	Story Planning Template	Story Planning Template
Title of your story: _____ SETTING: Where does your story take place? in a garden	Title of your story: <u>What Pollinators Do.</u> SETTING: Where does your story take place? Front yard	Title of your story: <u>Ray R</u> SETTING: Where does your story take place? Santa Fe in a garden full of bees
CHARACTERS: Who is your story about? Main character's name: <u>butterfly</u> What are their motivations? <u>to keep pollinating</u> Do they have special skills or hobbies? <u>they can pollinate in their sleep.</u> What are their personality traits? <u>Cool, awesome and heroic</u>	CHARACTERS: Who is your story about? Main character's name: _____ What are their motivations? _____ Do they have special skills or hobbies? _____ What are their personality traits? _____	CHARACTERS: Who is your story about? Main character's name: <u>Milo</u> What are their motivations? <u>To pollinate and to keep flowers safe</u> Do they have special skills or hobbies? <u>pollinating, and making g</u> What are their personality traits? <u>fun, friendly, funny, studious</u>
What happens in your story? Problem/Conflict: <u>Go into hibernating in forest</u> Resolution: <u>She wakes up</u>	What happens in your story? Problem/Conflict: <u>The some pollinators dont have homes</u> Resolution: <u>Pollinators plant more plants so they have a home!</u>	What happens in your story? Problem/Conflict: <u>Flower are disappearing</u> Resolution: <u>the bees learn how to plant flowers</u>

However, by the time the second part of the activity could have been introduced (the book folding) a few children were distracted which led to the environment in general feeling a bit noisy and overstimulating. At this point, I believe that there could have been a whole class book folding demo for some more structure in this portion of class. Consistency, routine, and structure are important for emotional development and trauma-informed pedagogy (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021) & (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy 2020). I believe that the lack of consistency and structure in this class period, in addition to Jocelyn and I neglecting to remove stress from today's assignment (emphasizing that this worksheet was not for a grade, that the reading was not necessary, and that the worksheet was intended to generate ideas for the main art-portion), might have left a few students feeling unmotivated.

While there were a number of students who worked the entire time and immediately got the lesson, there were those who tended to get distracted. Of those who fell into one or two of the following categories:

- Students that were a bit confused about the lesson (whether they were new to the class or because of the nature of week two's curriculum itself!). These students

were easily redirected and regained interest when given instructions a second time, given demos, or asked guiding questions. This sparked an interest in the topic and they proceeded to create their pollinator book.

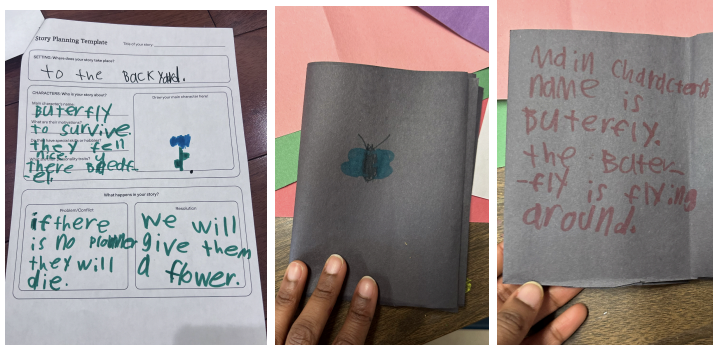
- Students who were stuck on how to create their story (whether it was of their ability to do art or of themselves in general). They benefited from constructive encouragement about their art, ideas and guiding questions or prompts that inspired them to continue. This bullet overlapped with bullet point # three quite often!
- students that are full of very abstract ideas but need assistance with channeling their energy and/or executing their ideas. These students (while full of energy, imagination, or both!) benefit from being asked about their interests and how their interests can possibly tie in with their art-making process. They also benefit from having lots of material choices and prompts about how they can apply them! For the next class, I would love to see if they can somehow mix their vibrant ideas into the lesson! It would also benefit Jocelyn and I to have a wealth of more materials for the next lesson. We were lacking in materials in this lesson which I believe led to a few students in “category three” feeling understimulated.

Most of the class completed their work diligently while there were several students who became distracted falling into the above categories. Aside from building more trust with students in general, I believe that by adjusting the way that Jocelyn and I conduct the lesson for week three, we can

- 1. Offer a hook that will grab their attention!

- 2. be intentional about supporting the distracted students promptly, getting them on track, before checking in on the students who are focused most strongly on the initial, starting phase of the project.
- Offer more choices in terms of materials, like in week one!

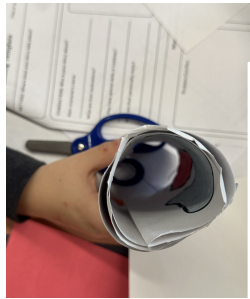
That being said, I was glad that I was able to support the several students I had in mind from last week who needed that more tailored support as well as checking in on other students. For instance, I encouraged one student who was using the chrome-book last class, to sit in community with peers that were working quietly. Besides getting up a few times, he worked the whole time! In the beginning, he was unsure about the nature of some of the questions but we got started on it together. By the time I came back around towards the end, he had come up with lovely ideas for his “thinking sheet” and started a wonderful book about a butterfly. He seemed to work well with one-on-one guidance this week. I am curious about how he will enjoy next week’s materials and project, which is one that is more kinesthetic and one that allows for more freedom of choice with materials.



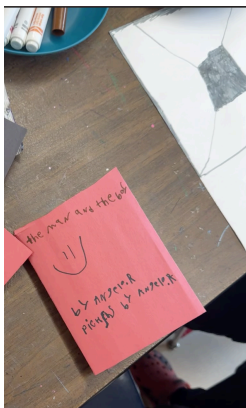
Other approaches that worked well were checking in and asking distracted students if they needed help on an assignment.

There was a student who made a cylindrical book by requesting a stapler. He is also responsible for the week one, “bird in a jet pack, going to minecraft world through a portal”. I

believe that this student would also benefit from having more choices in materials and a bit more freedom and agency in the next class to channel his restless energy into the art. Perhaps a tailored approach in the next week might benefit him as well. I think that getting him focused early on will be helpful.



A new student shared that he likes using an “illusion” technique in his artwork, and he ended up making a book about a “man and a boy”, where the boy hit a flaming meteorite falling into earth back into the sky. While not related to pollinators, this book shows a high amount of creativity and a desire to stretch his imagination a bit. I think that he and the boys at his table would benefit from more choices in materials and more scaffolding at the beginning to get them focused and interested in how their art-ideas relate to the project.



The after school coordinator came in at the end and said kids have given really great feedback about the program and would love to have us back for another program. She is the

same person who pointed out a table of four boys and invited us to “call down to the office if anyone at that table ever needs to take a walk,”

They have been a bit rowdy but nothing more drastic than occasionally getting up out of their seat and being overly energetic. However, so far, walking over to their table to check on their process, reminding the whole class to respect their art time, giving their table demos, and asking them questions about their interesting ideas usually work in prompting them to return to their seat or focus their attention. I suppose that it is nice to have an option for students that are a bit overstimulated or just need a moment to have a moment of quiet to regulate or reflect. However, I would not use this as a threat. I am certain that there is a different way to phrase “calling down to the office” so that it does not carry such a weighty connotation.

I definitely need to build more trust with these students though. I think that they just need more choices and tailored support in the beginning, since that is where they got the most distracted this time!

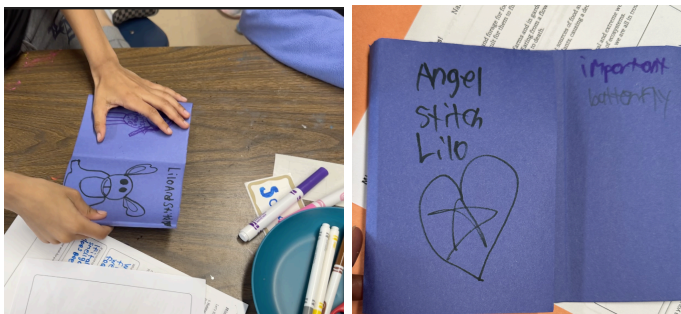
Agency: Student Choice & Voice

Though we had plenty of examples of students sharing their voice in this class, as demonstrated in verbal discussions led by Jocelyn at the beginning of the class, verbal documentation collected by Jocelyn and I during the class and during an optional student presentation, Jocelyn and I could have included more avenues for choice!

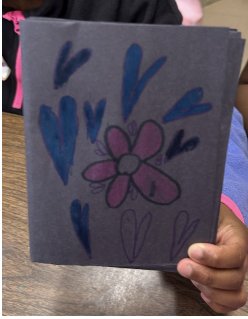
Choice is a central element in teaching philosophies like Reggio Emilia, an approach that empowers children by allowing them to choose their own form of communication through materials (Aden & Theodotou 2019). Choice and voice is a crucial component of trauma informed pedagogy as well. It offers individuals a sense of empowerment and allows them to feel as if their ideas and experiences are honored.

There are even effects that reveal how offering a student a sense of control can aid with emotional regulation, something that could have benefited a few students this week. Overall, what we, as educators, can offer is patience and guidance, as children learn best when they are supported by compassionate educators and presented with the freedom to express themselves in a multitude of ways (Aden & Theodotou 2019).

Another student who was a bit uncertain in the initial stages, chose to work with a bright blue color because of her love of Lilo and stitch. After some tailored support, she eventually made a pollinator book that incorporated both elements! She was *significantly* less distracted during week two. I believe that this is because she incorporated her interests into the lesson and perhaps because we set small goals to achieve a larger project. Based on my brief conversations with her, encouragement seems to be very helpful. I think that it is important for her to know that she can trust in her ability to do art and to take risks. In addition to this, my tailored instruction with this student, breaking the assignment up into small achievable goals in addition to showing interest and encouragement was very helpful.



The student's tablemate, a new student, was understandably confused in the beginning about what a pollinator was and how to do the assignment! Inspired by her friend, she decided that she would add her favorite elements of "Totally Spies" into the pollinator book lesson!



According to Reggio Emilia philosophy, student interest emerges when they are able to choose their own modes of communication and when they feel also empowered (Aden & Theodotou 2019). These two were incredibly excited to share their pollinator books!

Vulnerability and Trust Building

Trauma Informed Intervention

About an hour in, one student from last time, the neurodivergent girl (according to the after school coordinator), became distressed and withdrawn and had isolated herself towards a corner of the classroom. Jocelyn pointed out the behavior to me and I went over to check on her. She was removing dried glue from the caps of glue bottles as a self soothing activity. I engaged her in quiet conversation to understand her feelings. At first I thought it might've been about the assignment but it was about the likelihood of a storm (there had been one last night) due to the darkening clouds. Whether this is how larger anxieties were manifesting or this was just what she decided to tell me, we checked the weather on my phone together (She did not want to look at first so I checked first and then we looked together when I told her it was only going to snow). I asked her what is a safe place for her when she is scared like this. She said that her home is with her mom who “gives her hugs and kisses”and “helps her with her anxiety”. I asked her if there is a way she can feel safe now and if she could bring some safety of her home here to school. She said that she would like to “draw Catnap but only with posca markers”. Luckily, I had some

posca's with me. I asked if she wanted to come with me back to her table and she agreed and she proceeded to draw quietly for the rest of the class, sharing her idea with another student who recognized the figure. This solution seemed ideal to me and seemed to align with her needs. Researcher Ayre & Krishnamoorthy 2020 writes about educators aiding students with dysregulation, specifically dissociation in the classroom.

When speaking with one of the after-school coordinators later, Jocelyn and I discovered that this is "normal" behavior for the student. The after school coordinator described the student as being "sensitive" and characterized her and another student as being "on the spectrum". In my discussion with this girl, using language such as "where do you feel the safest?", "Is there any way we can help you bring some of that place with you to school?", "Is there any way that you can bring your safe place here with you to school?", was very helpful in helping her to regulate her anxiety (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy 2020.). I am glad that she was able to open up to me so that we could work through this together.

Additionally, the researcher posits that allowing the child to quietly go to a 'designated safe space' within the classroom or engaging in a separate, grounding activity can help regulate their emotions as well (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy 2020). In an art education space, this could be a corner or a table with drawing or sensory material corner. While I am not sure what exact triggered this moment of anxiety, whether it was the overstimulating noise of the classroom, the assignment itself, the idea of facing storm away from the safety of her home, or a combination of all of these things, I am glad that this student found a way to regulate their emotions by returning to their seat to draw her favorite character.



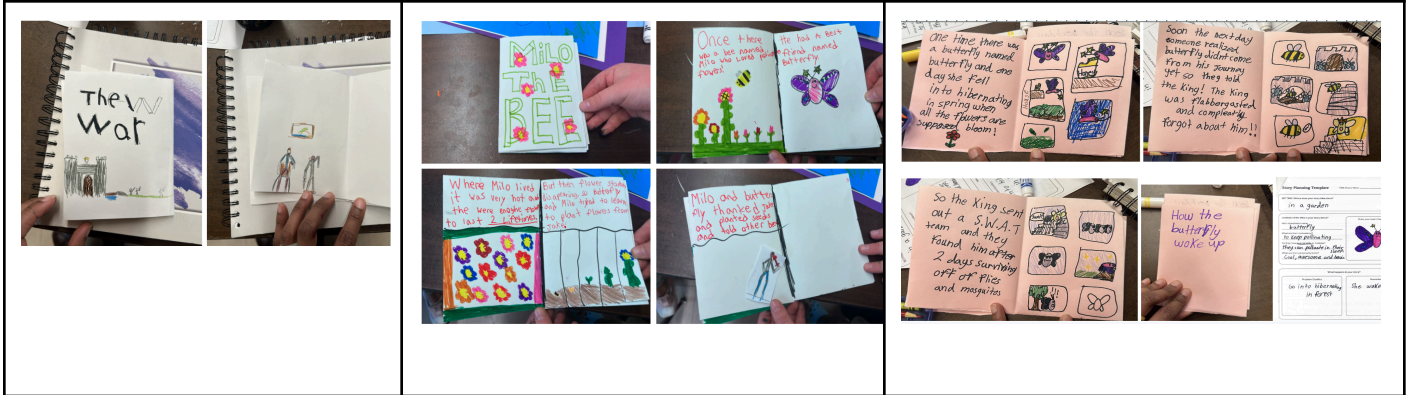
Listening and Documentation

A number of students put their own unique spin on the pollinator book prompt for this week, depicting wonderfully creative stories!

The student who showed me his sketchbook last week followed through on his promise! He incorporated one of the popular characters from his sketchbook into his book, creating a very interesting story about a knight. Even though this wasn't explicitly about pollinators, I am glad to see that he is using choice here. In a way, he was able to still tie it into the pollinator lesson by collaborating with not one, but with two classmates that he befriended during his time during the art-class.

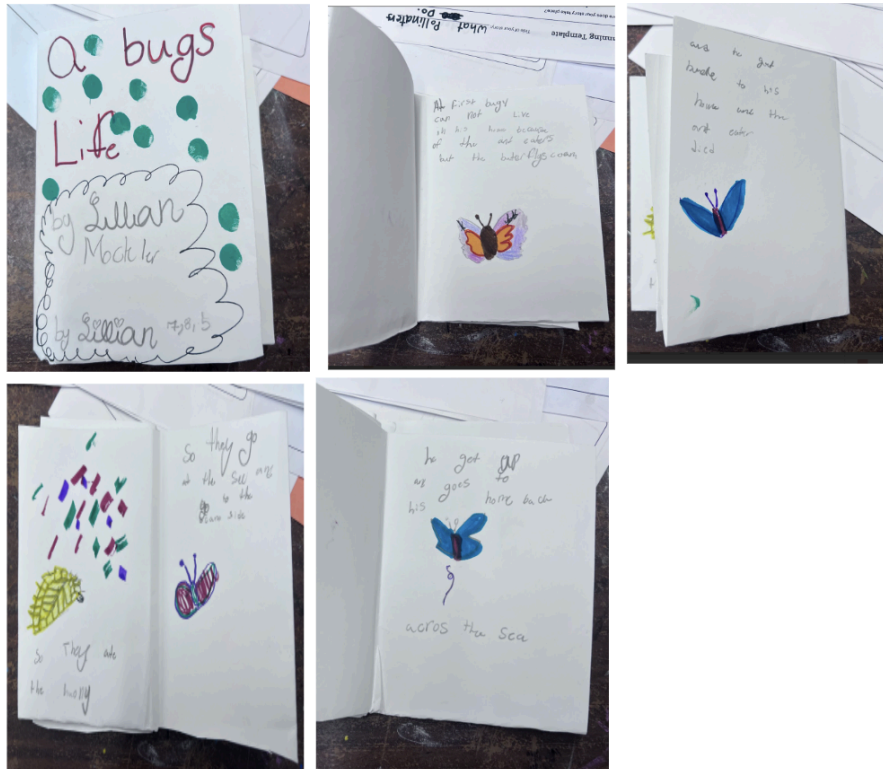
“Once there was a bee named Milo who loved pollinating flowers! He had a best friend named Butterfly. Where Milo lived it was very hot and there were enough flowers to last 2 lifetimes. But then flowers started disappearing, so Butterfly and Milo tried to learn to plant flowers from Jake. Milo and Butterfly thanked Jake and planted seeds and told other bees.”

Student A	Student B	Student C
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(In this lovely and unexpected instance of student collaboration, the butterfly is student C's character and "Jake" the cut-out knight, is student A's character!)

Examples of Other Creative Stories!



This student shared how much she was enjoying herself a lot and asked if there could be more programs after the next week or even next year when she's in fifth grade. I am glad to see that

Overall, though it got a bit busy at some points, it was another fun class with lovely art! I loved hearing everyone's ideas, from one student who made a book about a bee who turned a parking garage into a forest or another student who made a book about a butterfly who fell into hibernation, only to wake up again! I was so grateful to be in an environment with so much creativity! I believe that by offering more tailored assistance and encouragement, and incorporating elements of trauma, an engaged approach Jocelyn and I were able to improve the experience for students by removing stress, building trust, helping a student through her distress, and trying to make the space more comfortable, by noticing and responding).

The agreements that we discussed at the beginning of the lesson pertaining to materials, time, space, and each other were helpful in redirection and highlighted the importance of mutual respect and consideration in our art space.

One agreement that we had discussed as a class was to wait until our peers were done talking about their art before having a conversation with your friend. They respected this during presentation time! Additionally, we discussed the importance of respecting our art space by handling materials safely and assisting in cleanup. The former was a bit of a challenge in this class. They handled the clean-up portion very nicely but some students were a bit rough with the animal models that they could use as inspiration for their stories. Again, the models might not have been age-appropriate and serves as encouragement for Jocelyn and I to bring more age-focused materials for next time!

Our last agreement emphasized the value of respecting our own art time. Students were encouraged to draw inspiration from the lesson while expressing their creativity while a few students got a bit distracted now and again. I believe that Jocelyn and I could have incorporated more opportunities for agency in this lesson and a more structured lesson by communicating more about who was leading which part of the lesson would have helped us a lot in the beginning. Thinking back, while it was peppered in during our conversations with students, we did not have a moment at the beginning of the lesson where we explicitly emphasized focused on the stress removal portion either.

Lastly, Being vulnerable, building trust amongst ourselves and learning to collaborate as new educators throughout this process has been necessary to building a more trauma informed space as well. I have often thought about the words of Danielle Signh who said that the trauma informed nature of her work as an art teacher would have been impossible to achieve without having a community of other trauma informed art teachers, social workers, and behavior specialists. In Reeves, 2019, they acknowledged that while art education is capable of transforming a classroom for the better, art educators must rely on each other, given that institutions themselves are not always supportive (Reeves 2019). Ayre & Krishnamoorthy 2020 also discusses creating action plans with fellow educators and relying on fellow staff when calmly and effectively addressing student behavior.

Despite studying different aspects of this class Jocelyn and I were still able to collaborate on and provide two out of three weeks worth of fun lesson plans for the students of Norwood Elementary. I am very grateful that I have gotten the opportunity to learn from her and her perspectives. It has also been nice checking in with Jocelyn at the end of every class period and outside of class, to plan for the next week.

While today got busy during some portions, the students still had a fun time and got something valuable out of the lesson. The after school coordinator invited us back to perform more lessons!

For next week, Jocelyn and I will refine our approach. In addition to creating a more age-focused lesson plan, I think that Jocelyn or I should drift over to the table of boys first while the other drifts over to a table with other students who need some additional support when starting before, of course, drifting over to all of the students.

week three Personal Reflection/Notes

Addressing Behavior: Challenging Shame Based Structures

Having Consistent structure & Clear expectations

I presented briefly on the artist Dr Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg and the concept “Gardening with Empathy” and Jocelyn presented information that is essential for pollinators to survive in gardens. With these concepts, we had a quick discussion on empathy and the children were able to complete a drawing activity with the prompt: “what does a garden planted with empathy for pollinators look like?” to prepare them for their diorama activity. We then moved into the art room for our main project. Students who were distracted last week were more focused and engaged this week!

Besides a few minor distractions, even the students who struggled to stay focused during week two were engaged the entire class. For instance, week two’s category three students (students who, during week two, got distracted due to a lack of agency and tailored support). To expand on the latter point, applying the clear and consistent structure, similar to week one, worked very well. Every student absolutely thrived this week!

For example, the works below belong to a table of energetic boys. Two of the boys needed a bit of tailored support in the beginning when it came to redirecting their energy to the material table, but once they had chosen their materials and boxes, their whole group had a drastic increase in focus and attention . I attribute this to several factors.



- For one, having a more structured, age-focused lesson, allowed for more structured support in the beginning! Students were eager to engage in the materials right away and most got on task. Those who needed some additional guidance could be easily redirected because of tailored support, especially the table of boys as seen above!

- Furthermore, after allowing them to choose the materials they wanted, they remained working. This freedom to engage in art in ways that appealed to them was key to their learning. Ayre & Krishnamoorthy (2020), note that offering a student a sense of control can aid with

emotional regulation. This week and week one activities were highly kinesthetic in nature. Coupled with the fact that these projects allowed for choice and both included media that is classified as what art therapists would refer to as *resistive media*, or materials that are tactile and physically engaging (ETC Assessment, 2017). In other words, these media were more grounding. Studies have shown that kinesthetic activities with resistive media can release tension, promote relaxation, and increase the ability to tolerate difficult emotions like anxiety. Interestingly, anxiety can manifest as distress, irritability, anger, **restlessness** and **inattentiveness** (The Palmeira Practice, 2019). Brummer, & Thorsborne, 2021, p. 50, write that “Fight” responses of the fight, flight, Freeze, Fawn, “Stress Response” behaviors in school can manifest in unexpected ways such as **silliness**, **pacing**, **getting up from desks** and other behaviors that one wouldn’t typically expect, some of which the group of boys were engaging in during week two when they lacked structure and the ability to channel their ideas.

- Prompting and encouraging specific students to explore materials, to walk me through their process & tailored approaches and friendly, patient check-ins with positive reinforcement were needed only a few times to redirect behavior.

The Reggio Emilia approach encourages educators to build trust and establish connection through active listening as a form of documentation. I attempted to do more frequent check-ins with this table (Rinaldi 2001). This, coupled with positive reinforcement, patient check-ins, did wonders in establishing trust that had been lacking between me and the boys at this table in the previous weeks. A few of them asked for help with art advice and with materials, something that they had never requested in previous weeks!

•Though this was likely a small factor, we also had access to music this week which one student requested immediately upon walking into the room. There was age-appropriate music playing, occasionally shuffling to songs requested by several students in week one.

For the most part, students worked calmly for a majority of the time with only a few minor distractions, prompting redirection methods.

Jocelyn and I did not find “calling down to the office” to be a necessary disciplinary tactic, which was suggested to us by a well-meaning afterschool program coordinator should we ever face challenges with “that table of boys”. However, current methods can always still use tweaking (side conversations with peers while classmates were presenting their art posed as a challenge).

Also needed were the occasional reminder for using respectful conversation. Redirection methods such as calling attention to our agreements, emphasizing our art space as one of respect and safety were helpful. This was strengthened by initially building trust by patiently and compassionately checking in with students, giving them authentic encouragement, and showing genuine interest in them and their art.

Jocelyn found similar luck while drifting over to a group of three girls at the very beginning of class who tend to get distracted due to their tendency to draw off of each other's excitement. They, too, were highly focused and interested in the art project throughout the class period!

Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021 talks about replacing disciplinary tactics used to shame with positive reinforcement, like encouragement. As a full-time teacher, I will continue to use such methods, in place of other commonplace shame-based disciplinary measures. If a measure like “calling down to the office” becomes necessary, I think that removing shame and fear from

the phrase or having a plan with these students would be necessary as well as the students having a clear understanding and expectation of consequences should they arise. While I do not believe it was expressly needed at any point, I believe if Jocelyn and I enact this as a consequence without discussing it with any of the boys first, it will perpetuate an incredibly harmful cycle of shame and exclusion that occurs within schools. Ayre, & Krishnamoorthy, (2020) mentions that children who frequently slip into highly elevated behaviors should also be included in the planning process for their deescalation plan. Removing them from this choice strips them of autonomy and voice, resulting in a practice that creates hierarchical power imbalances between schools, which, of course, is decidedly un-trauma informed (Ayre & Krishnamoorthy 2020).

For instance, depending on how students personally respond to experiencing shame (whether that is fight, flight, freeze, or fawn) their behavior may become a vicious cycle of challenging behavior, like “fight”, for instance, if it is continuously followed by shame based discipline.

I believe that dismantling these seemingly innocuous but prevalent shaming tactics will prove crucial if we are to create environments that are truly trauma informed. We must remind students of their self worth and their value, not continually remind them of their perceived or imagined shortcomings.

Earlier in the week, the after school program coordinator identified a black neurodivergent student as having “behavioral challenges” such as “tattling” on his peers. I have never had any challenges with this student other than redirecting him back to his seat, redirecting chromebook usage, or occasionally, finding the real “need” behind the “tattling” -which was usually just the need to be acknowledged and listened to. That being said, I only witnessed a few instances of this behavior and all were easily redirected by hearing him out and communicating

with him about his concern, and redirecting his attention to another activity. This class period, however, there was an incident when one of this student's white peers (who tried to switch boxes with him at the beginning of the class), announced to the class that he was offended by the student's utterance of "what the freak?". Later, this same student shouted at the neurodivergent student for "getting paint in his hair" when the student walked past him (the student did not get paint in his hair). During these instances, This student was seen as "overacting" by his peers . Another black student attempted to helpfully interject to the black neurodivergent student "remember how our teacher always tells you to calm down?". At her words, he visibly tried to bottle up the hurt he felt.

Though these incidents, while brief, and while Jocelyn and I were quick to verify the facts, de-escalate and/or redirect the conversation, emphasizing the importance of respecting peers and respectful communication, I find the expectation that he, as black, neurodivergent student, is required to remedy emotionally charged situations.

It is often the case that marginalized individuals do the emotional labor and feel less secure in spaces than more privileged individuals. They are expected to "manage other people's emotions and social expectations" which "typically results in the laborer's own emotional experience being disregarded and thwarted by this lack of respect and consideration" (Wong 2019). I did make an extra effort to keep an eye on this student, checking in on him and his process. I was glad to see that, at the end of class, he felt brave enough to volunteer to share his work(it was his first time sharing!). He engaged with everyone, asking, "before I show you, can anyone guess what's inside of this?". He received a few curious responses, before revealing his creation.

I did feel reassured however, when Jocelyn mentioned that a teacher from the second week briefly popped into the class and told Jocelyn that the student might need a bit of guidance. Apparently, she mentioned that we can seek her out if we need assistance talking with him. Luckily, this student was very talkative during the programs so we did not get to take advantage of her assistance, but knowledge of this offer assures me that he receives tailored support during the day from individuals that are patient and non judgemental.

When I compare this to the after school coordinator's friendly warning about his tendency to "tattle", I understand that her warning came from a good place. However, I also feel that sometimes, when considering student behavior, it is important to reframe it as an unmet need. While it *is* necessary to help a child learn conflict resolution skills and productive communication, I believe that it is important for educators to understand where a need like this originates so that we may understand where the need originates and guide them to overcome these skills. "Tattling" stems from a desire to be validated and acknowledged: to be heard. Offering students, especially students who need special assistance during the day, the guidance and support that they require to learn the skills to support themselves, rather than meeting the behavior with judgment, seems much more productive.

I also spent a while after this class thinking about the one child in conflict with the neurodivergent boy, trying to decipher what his need might be. This student was also pointed out to Jocelyn and I by the well-intentioned after-school program coordinator, who mentioned that he, among the four other boys, could call the office if any of them needed to "take a walk". When I hear this, I think about how everyone requires survival, fun, love and belonging, freedom and power in oneself, according to Glasser W., 2020. I believe that taking this action without having a plan in place, would have perpetuated a cycle of shame and exclusion that occurs within

schools, reinforcing power imbalances (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021). This, of course, is damaging to one's sense of community belonging and ultimately, one's sense of survival.

In addition to needing a clear and consistent environment, it is necessary for educators to convey to students the importance of respect and safety in a classroom community which Jocelyn and I reinforced. Similarly, students must understand that they are part of a community where every student has intrinsic value, and that they are capable (and expected to) contribute and communicate safely and respectfully within that community. To students with this challenge, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of their contributions and their voice: that they will always belong and that they will always be welcome, even if they make a mistake.

However, it is particularly important for them to voice their needs and struggles to a teacher in a way that is respectful and safe. I tried my best to communicate this with the student today. If I were his longterm teacher, I would work on building more trust with him so that he feels comfortable opening up about his needs to prevent them from manifesting in the ways that they did today.

In the past, I have worked with kids who have been extremely reactive because they felt as if their voices did not matter. In my early days of knowing them, this manifested in them communicating their frustration in the only ways they knew how: through yelling or aggression. While this student's behavior was much less extreme, I believe that this boy should know that his voice is important and will only be met with non-judgemental and supportive responses. While is not my intention to excuse his behavior but I am attempting to understand it. Boryga 2022 writes that in order to de-escalate situations and to build trust with more reactive students, educators can build trust by patiently addressing behaviors in a non-reactive manner, showing concern, centering the student rather than the behavior.

It is these systems that Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021 refer to: that create this trauma stemming from shame, rejection and isolation. No one is spared from the harm but the most vulnerable among us, those who carry diverse identities, bear the brunt of this trauma (Proctor, et al., 2020).

Discrimination is a trauma which exacerbates shame. We as educators must be mindful. We must understand that every human behavior is driven by the pursuit of universal human needs (Glasser 2020). We must remind students of their self worth and their value, not continually remind them of their shortcomings. A behavioral “challenge” (however this manifests) is indicative of a need that is not being met. As educators, we may not know the specifics of this need, but we can build trust, have patience, compassion and offer support.

Agency: Student Choice, Voice

That being said, many students, including the student spoken about above, gave verbal feedback, both prompted and unprompted, about how they were having a lot of fun engaging in the project.

Like “*why does time go so fast when you’re having fun?*”

In addition to their boxes, they had plenty of choices to choose from!



We had music playing at a reasonable volume (which is a ritual that we neglected to incorporate in session two, that definitely added to the ambiance).

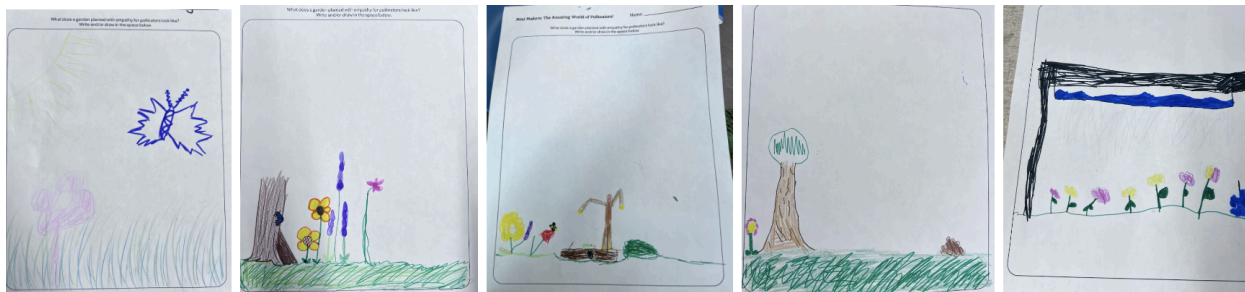
They expressed that they were sad that this was the last lesson and regretful that they did not have more time to finish.

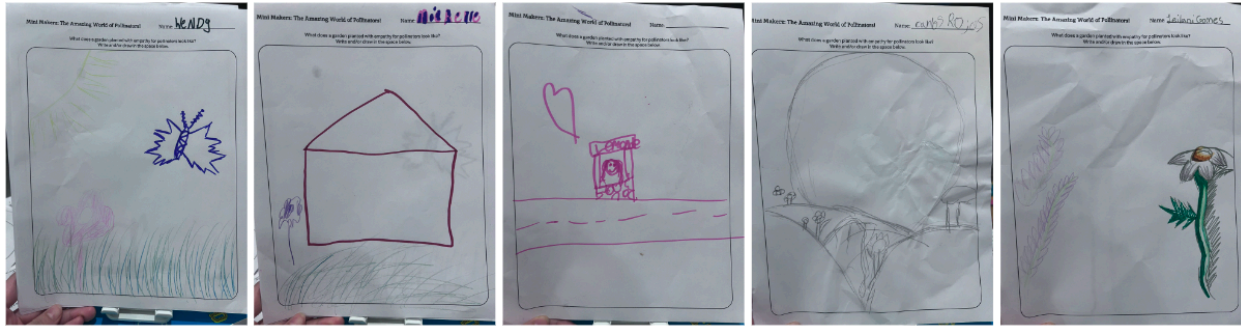
Jocelyn and I checked in on every student, providing tailored support when needed but largely allowing the students to decide how they wanted to create scenes responding to the prompt “create a garden with empathy”.

Removing Stress

As they were working, a few students were worried about what would “happen” if they did not finish. Jocelyn and I let them know that it was absolutely ok if they did not finish, that they could finish it later, at home and even take a few supplies with them if they wanted. We emphasized that it is “ok, as long as you try your best!”.

Perhaps next time, finding smaller boxes, or leaving a bit more room at the beginning, rather than drawing a prototype garden, would give them even more time to add to their final gardens, but many of them had wonderful visual responses for the prompt “*what does a garden planted with empathy for pollinators look like?*” And this aided in the creation of their project. Some students created traditional garden spaces, some students thought up more surprising ideas such as museum gardens, lemonade stands, and even greenhouses for pollinators to enjoy. Here are a few examples.





After the planning portion, many students considered how their placement of plants would impact the butterflies and bees that came into the spaces.



One student made “a park that's made for pollinators and humans”, another made “a garden for pollinators to live”, another student wanted both “pollinators, animals, and Stitch from Lilo and Stitch” to come to her garden”



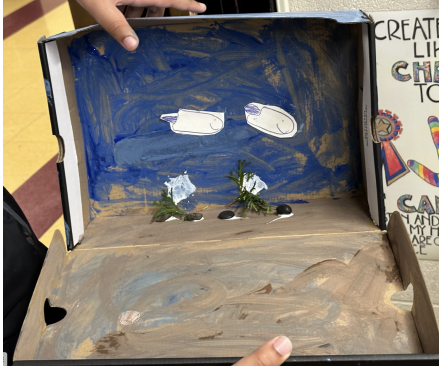
Another student, the student responsible for the minecraft penguin and the cylinder book, created a beehive for the bees to rest like grass and stones. It included the honey that they made. This student was inattentive and restless during week two but showed stark improvement in

interest during week three. When I commented on all of the hard work that he put in, he was uncertain about whether his art was “good” but received enthusiastic encouragement from the peers at his table. “He thinks it’s not good but I keep telling him that it’s really good!”, one classmate commented.



Though statements like this might’ve been present in other weeks, I was so grateful that I was able to overhear peer encouragement like this during week three as well. Later, in a section about vulnerability, I will discuss peer encouragement.

The neurodivergent student who needed prompting or tailored support, during weeks 1 and 2, was very interested in this lesson! He worked the entire time and was very excited to share about his process during and at the end of the end of class during share time. He needed very few tailored approaches to this lesson so it seems that he benefited from having lots of agency and choices in materials. He benefited from having a clear lesson that engaged in sensory materials! That allowed him the freedom to engage in art topics that interested him. It was not explicitly pollinator related but he did create a space for “beautiful fish!” and he was delighted by different colors that he was able to create by mixing brown, white, and dark blue.



Vulnerability and Trust Building

This student, among others, was excited to share about their process! Students were also excited to share during share time! We had five new sharers this week, three of whom had historically been quiet during class. We had many instances of students encouraging each other during work-time (overheard by teachers)

A table of three girls in the back quietly discussing each other's work.

Friend 1: “[name of friend], I love yours!”

Friend 2: “Thank you!”

Friend 3: “Do you like mine?”

Friend 1: “Yes, I love yours too!”

They then began to discuss their process of how they made each of theirs

During presentation time (though there were a few side conversations happening during presentation time as well, the encouragement from the peer audience was also new, surprising, and very welcome!).

“Woah, that’s so cool!”

“Oo nice!”

I am very glad that we had new students that felt brave enough to share with the class!

After learning about our artist and the core of her work as an artist and scientist, that surrounds the concept “gardening with empathy”, several students had the chance to share “how they use empathy in their own lives”. Student answers included:

“If my friend falls off his bike, I will get off my bike to help him”

“If my friend gets hurt, I don’t laugh at them”

Within the context of this class, we had students share that in order to use empathy to consider pollinators when making a garden. A few student answers included:

“make them[pollinators] happy”

“be considerate”

“Not pick the flowers while they [pollinators] are trying to pollinate it”

More amazing examples of student work!



Willcox, L. 2017 speaks about psychologically safe spaces,

explaining that if students feel empowered in a space, meaning that if they feel compelled to create, respond, and present in some way, it increases the likelihood of them genuinely participating in the art and repeating the emotional benefits as well (Willcox, L. 2017). It allows for a certain vulnerability, like presenting your work in front of your peers and teachers for the very first time. Not only that, by incorporating formal mindfulness in art education classrooms, such as showing a genuine interest in student artwork, planning lessons surrounding reconstruction and deconstruction art (such as hands-on art), or emphasizing an environment where mistakes are ok (Dunn-Snow & D'Amelio 2000.), informal mindfulness begins to happen naturally. Informal mindfulness behaviors include vulnerability, empathetic listening, and being attuned to others and ourselves (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021, p. 91). When we begin to adopt a mindful outlook, we can also experience self compassion, emotional regulation, and a non-judgemental acceptance of the present moment which can lead to a reduction in shame. I think that it is important to note that “safe” and “brave” spaces work in tandem with each other. Safe spaces provide the groundwork for building trust while brave spaces are significant in producing growth. I found it so powerful that we had several new sharers today, observing how the safe space that we've been trying to model merged with a brave one as the student's pushed towards communication and equitable participation.