

Building Resiliency through the Circle of Courage and Art Therapy

An Action Research Project

By

Marcia Novo

A thesis submitted to the Winnipeg Holistic Expressive Arts Therapy Institute
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

ART THERAPY DIPLOMA

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February 2021

Abstract

At-risk youth in northern Manitoba face mental health barriers to achieving success in public schools. Access to mental health resources is scarce. Art therapy can be integrated into regular school hours in a culturally appropriate manner to promote resiliency in youth that have experienced trauma. This action research project explored how art therapy can be integrated with the Circle of Courage model (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Brocken, 2002) to promote resiliency among Indigenous youth in an alternative high school.

Group art therapy sessions with five Indigenous female students were held over a six-week period, with each session focusing on one aspect of the Circle of Courage: Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity. Participants responded to pre- and post-session surveys and the researcher collected anecdotal notes and images of the participants' artwork. Due to the school's closure because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the post-session survey was completed when school resumed and participants gathered and reflected on their art processes.

Participants' responses to the surveys showed an increase in feelings of Belonging, Independence and Mastery. They continued to feel a sense of Generosity, which had been higher at the start. The students all indicated that they would like to continue group art therapy when Covid-19 restrictions were lifted.

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Terminology

Alternative High School: The school offers a flexible format and relaxed atmosphere; students are able to complete the required curriculum at a pace that works for them. Class size is limited in order to be able to provide the students with the small group support they require. Our focus is on building student success by providing personal, social and emotional support as well as remediation and academic upgrading.

Arts Educator: Art teacher certified to teach K-12 curriculum in the province

Art Therapist: Art therapists are mental health professionals with graduate level training.

Art therapy student (in Canada): Students who are enrolled in an art therapy training program that meets educational standards of the Canadian Art Therapy Association.

At Risk Youth: Brokenleg (2012) includes a definition of youth at risk: “some proportion of all youth who lived in high-risk environments that may cause them to falter” (p.9).

Indigenous: First Nations, Inuit or Metis

Participant: Interchangeable with student

Public Schools: Publicly funded schools under the jurisdiction of provincial Departments of Education

School Guidance Counsellor: School counsellors provide education, guidance, and counselling to all students in the school through activities such as direct instruction, psycho-education, individual or group counselling, advocating and connecting to community resources.

Building Resiliency through the Circle of Courage and Art Therapy

Schools in Canada are experiencing a mental health crisis with their students. School guidance counsellors are being tasked with the responsibility of helping students who experience depression, anxiety, and suicide ideation as well as complex and intergenerational trauma (Katz, 2008). There is a service gap between students who require mental health services and their ability to access them.

Trained art therapists could help to fill this gap. Art therapy blends art and psychology through the creative process, with a view to improving mental health (Malchiodi, 2007). Art therapy in schools differs from art education. The main focus of art education is learning and development of art making skills. Art therapy focusses on the process of creating, with less attention to the product. The variety of modalities available to an art therapist is broad and can provide alternatives to traditional talk therapy. Art therapy can be offered with individuals and with groups.

This action research project explored how art therapy can be integrated with the Circle of Courage model to promote resiliency among Indigenous youth in an alternative high school. The Circle of Courage is a model of positive youth development that integrates Indigenous child raising practices and contemporary research about resilience. It is based on the four universal needs of Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity, which together promotes resiliency and well-being (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 1990).

The project involved five Indigenous female students in a series of group art therapy sessions. In each session they created art related to one part of the Circle of Courage. The project was interrupted when the school closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and students completed art

related to the last part of the Circle on their own. They gathered once again when the school re-opened.

Students responded to surveys about resilience before the sessions started and when they met after the school re-opened. Their responses to the surveys showed an increase in feelings and thoughts related to Belonging, Independence and Mastery. They continued to feel a sense of Generosity; in the first survey their responses about generosity had been higher than responses in the other areas. The students all indicated that they would like to continue group art therapy when Covid-19 restrictions were lifted.

The School Setting

The action research project was carried out in an alternative high school in a northern community. The school had approximately 85 students in grades from seven to twelve. The school has a trauma informed approach to their practice. Students attending the school are often referred from other schools due to poor attendance, disengagement or behavior issues. It is often discovered late that the issues at their previous schools were due to trauma, poverty, addictions and systemic racism. The student population is primarily Indigenous, including Metis and Cree students, living off reserves.

Personal Interest

I am a teacher and have been a school guidance counsellor for two years at the alternative high school. I took the position with no formal training in counselling aside from a couple of post graduate education courses. I began my art therapy summer training before the new position started. Art therapy shaped how I counselled students. It was usual practice in my school's area to refer students presenting mental health concerns to resources outside of the schools. I proposed that we could address mental health needs in our school, and with art therapy. My

principal and superintendent agreed that I could do my art therapy practicum hours with students in the school.

During my practicum I started an art therapy group in the period after lunch when students' behaviours in the hallways were an issue. Within two weeks of starting the group, the behaviours had stopped. Students who had been disengaged, were engaged and reconnected. Based on this and related experiences during my practicum, I proposed the action research project, which the principal and superintendent approved. The students were then asked if they would like to participate in a group art therapy action research project. They agreed and permission was obtained from their parents/guardians.

Situating Myself

I am a Settler ally working primarily with Indigenous youth. I acknowledge that the term "settler ally" is not a common term used within my community, however it does describe me. It is important for me to open the dialogue around colonial past practice, especially in regard to research done and facilitated by a Settler with Indigenous participants. This is a role that I do not take lightly and I recognize that I am still on a learning journey. I am a white woman who acknowledges her privilege in my personal and professional life. I am aware that my lived experience is likely very different from the students that I work with. I am university educated and grew up in a home where both my parents were also university educated. My parents have been married for 40 years and have three successful children who are all married and have their own families. I have been married for 15 years and have three children that I raise with my husband.

With that being said, I have deep roots in the North. I grew up here and feel connected to the land, to the community and to the people. I returned to the North twelve years ago. I am

passionate about access to education and mental health supports. I recognize my privilege affords me the ability to advocate with and for others, especially vulnerable and marginalized youth. There is a need for mental health supports here. There is equally a need to continue the conversation about meeting needs with the community. Connecting with other educators, art therapists, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, families, youth and community advocates has been very important in my work and will continue to be.

Literature Review

To provide context and support for the action research project, I reviewed literature about mental health and needs from Indigenous and western perspectives, including the impacts of intergenerational trauma, and about supporting youth mental health in schools. Other topics include resiliency and the Circle of Courage model and providing art therapy for youth, particularly Indigenous youth, and art therapy in schools. The review also considers suggestions for non-Indigenous art therapists working with Indigenous people.

Mental Health

What is mental health? There is no word in Cree that translates into English as ‘health.’ The closest term is *miyupimaatisiun*. *Miyu* means ‘good’ or ‘well,’ and *pimaatisiun* means ‘living’ or ‘alive.’ Thus, in combination, *miyupimaatisiun* becomes ‘he or she is alive well’ (Adelson, 2000).

This concept is taught to explain health from an Indigenous perspective. Kenanow means “all of us” in Cree. All our relations must be considered when learning together. The purpose is for the students to observe and learn the importance of place-based learning, especially in terms of Indigenous knowledge. The idea of living a good life means being healthy (Knowledge Keeper Les Michelle, personal communication, January 2020), a concept that is well known and

shared among educators, healers, the community and Elders. “Well-being gives our life meaning and purpose, and allows us to see the interconnections within ourselves, with others and with the planet” (Katz, 2018, p. 108).

From an Indigenous perspective, mental wellness is understood as a balance of body, mind, spirit, and emotions, and as a continuum (minimal to optimal). Less optimal wellness results from a disruption in the balance. The continuing impact of colonial policies, the residential school system and child welfare policies are a major source of disruption to mental health (Mussell, as cited in Norton, 2015).

Intergenerational trauma and mental health. Intergenerational trauma is trauma that gets passed down from those who directly experience an event to subsequent generations (Brokenleg, 2012). To fully comprehend the mental health of Indigenous people in Canada, an understanding of the collective trauma they have experienced is necessary.

Canada has a long history of oppression and abuse towards Indigenous people. Over the past one hundred years, thousands of children have been forcefully removed from their homes; through residential schools, the Sixties Scoop and the continued practices of Child and Family Service agencies (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2007). The National Inquiry for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls declared that decades of deaths amount to a Canadian genocide (Reclaiming power and place, 2019).

These experiences impacted and continue to negatively impact our Indigenous youth. The state of mental health challenges experienced by today’s Indigenous youth is concerning. Indigenous people have experienced trauma for generations. The Indigenous youth today experience intergenerational trauma impacted by colonization, residential schools and the child welfare system. The loss of identity and culture has impacted Indigenous youth greatly; they

experience impacts such as depression, anxiety, addictions, suicide and damage to their overall well-being (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2000).

In Western perspectives, mental health is a state of well-being, including psychological, emotional and social well-being (Government of Canada, 2020; Fritz, 2019). Adults, children and adolescents can experience challenges to this well-being, ranging from mental health problems to mental illness (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2021). Referring to Statistics Canada data, Katz (2018) reported that despite 20 percent of children and adolescents facing mental health problems, 75 percent of them are not receiving mental health services.

High school guidance counsellors are seeing an increase in students needing mental health support and are experiencing a decrease in the ability to provide it. The need is greater, and the supports are lacking. Schools often feel like the frontlines of the battle to address challenges to social, emotional, and mental well-being, with academic education being a priority (Fritz, 2019). A current provincial government report recommends that schools implement initiatives to address the holistic needs of children and youth, including social, emotional and mental well-being (Our Children's Success: Manitoba's Future, 2020).

Data collected from the school where this action research project took place supports the need for access to mental health services within the school. Eighty-seven percent of the students identify as Indigenous and are affected directly or indirectly by the impacts of intergenerational trauma. Students' well-being is also impacted by experiences of poverty. Fifty-eight per cent of the students (adolescents ages 13-18) are experiencing mental health concerns, 33% suffer from an addiction, and 35% have disclosed a sexual assault or have been sexually abused throughout their childhood (School Profile, 2019-2020). Students receive in school counselling and access to community resources for mental health, addictions counselling and family enhancement support.

Addressing Mental Health Challenges in Schools

Schools are a natural setting for access to mental health support and resources for students (Katz, 2018). In Manitoba, school attendance is mandatory until the age of 18. Schools are where students spend most of their adolescent years. Mental health concerns tend to present themselves in a student's academic performance or behavior in the classroom. Schools can support students to develop and practice skills related to mental health, such as social skills, emotional regulation and stress management. School is the place where students will encounter many of the social and academic challenges that are an everyday part of their lives, and where they will need to apply the coping skills being taught (Katz, 2018).

Research supports incorporating mental health resources in public schools. A review of research found that “specifically, student engagement with social emotional learning programs has been linked to greater academic success, as much as an improvement in academic performance by more than 10%” (Akwasi Twum-Antwi, 2019). Katz (2018) reported several benefits to improved mental well-being including educational achievement. A British Columbia Health study found that children who experienced physical and sexual abuse, and who had a positive connection with their school, had lower suicide ideation than other children who experienced physical and sexual abuse (Smith, 2009).

Resiliency

Resiliency is a concept related to individuals' capacity to overcome adversity and to achieve positive outcomes – mentally, emotionally, socially and spiritually, despite adversity. Researchers looking at resiliency have become interested in understanding why some individuals seem to bounce back after experiencing a traumatic situation while other individuals, in the same

or similar situations, experience any number of mental health difficulties (Graber, Pichon & Carabine, 2015).

There are protective factors that influence resiliency in youth. Some of these protective factors include a supportive adult-child relationship, a sense of self-efficacy and perceived control, adaptive skills and self-regulatory capacities and a source of hope. No protective factor is in isolation of each other. Resilience is developmental, both in the sense that childhood and adolescence are critical periods to lay foundations for functioning in adulthood and that individuals change and grow throughout life (Graber, Pichon & Carabine, 2015).

Resilience does not simply mean a child can or cannot overcome adversity. Ungar (2013) offers a definition of resilience that considers contextual and cultural factors; he suggests that the capacity of both individuals and their environments interact together to optimize development processes. Supportive relationships, practical assistance and access to environmental resources all contribute to an individual's ability to manage adversity (Ungar, 2013). Whether an individual values the resource is also a factor (Ungar, 2013).

Children who have experienced trauma and have protective factors at their disposal can heal. Related to the concept of resilience is the concept of plasticity and that psychological change is possible in the right environment (Stepney, 2017). When youth have an opportunity to heal, they can heal future generations.

The Circle of Courage Model

The Circle of Courage model can be used as a guide to promote resiliency in youth (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002). The model focuses on Indigenous value systems but is not limited to working with Indigenous youth. The authors propose that Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity make up the Circle of Courage. They state that a

complete circle equates to positive self-esteem in a child, indicating and validating the ability to be resilient. Traditional Indigenous perspectives on educational practices address each component of self-esteem. There is a universal need for belonging, competence was ensured by opportunities for mastery, power was fostered by encouraging the expression of independence and virtue was reflected in the pre-eminent value of generosity. The values of the model are universal but rooted in Indigenous perspectives. The model is shared as a medicine wheel.

Dr. Martin Brokenleg, an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, co-developed the model with colleagues (Larry Brendtro and Steve Van Bockern) at Augustana University, South Dakota, in 1990. Recently retired, Dr. Brokenleg has shared and taught this model to educators, therapists, counsellors and youth workers. The model has been adopted by organizations across the world (Martin Brokenleg, n.d.). Non-Indigenous art therapists need to be careful not to culturally appropriate models for their own practice and to always share where their teachings came from and cite when possible.

Art Therapy

What is art therapy? Rubin (2016) answers this question by saying, “The very foundation of art therapy is *art* itself” (p. 19). Art therapy is a form of mental health therapy that invites expression of the self through various modalities with a view to supporting or improving mental wellness. These modalities may include, but are not limited to, drawing, painting, sculpting or multimedia collaborations. For some, art *is* the therapy; the therapeutic value comes from the process of making art and reflecting about it. Art therapy has a variety of aspects including visual arts, creative process, human development, behavior, personality and mental health (Malchiodi, 2007).

Art has been a mode of healing for Indigenous people since long before art therapy as a profession was established. Knowledge keeper Les Michele (personal communication, January

2020) described how “art is more than just an image on a canvas. Every stroke, colour and symbol has a meaning to Indigenous people and it always has.” In the territory where I live, art as healing was through painting, birch bark biting, beading, drumming, and pow wow dancing. Symbolism in art has been passed down for centuries through traditional Indigenous healers and shamans, through stories, prayers, songs, chants and visual arts (Archibald, Dewar, Reid & Stephen, 2010).

In North America, Margaret Naumburg and Edith Kramer are often considered the grandmothers of contemporary art therapy theory and practice (Rubin, 2016). Naumburg based her “dynamically oriented art therapy” theoretical framework and its methods on releasing spontaneous art expression; it has its roots in the transference relation between patient and therapist, and in the practice of free association (Rubin, 2016). Naming her approach “art as therapy” Kramer (2016) advocated that the art process itself allowed the clients to recreate primary experiences and feelings, thereby offering an opportunity to re-experience conflict, resolve it and integrate it. Although Kramer drew from psychoanalytic theory to inform her approach to art therapy, she separated the role of the art therapist from that of the psychotherapist. Kramer did not believe it was the function of the art therapist to interpret the meaning of the work. The art therapist would witness the pleasures and satisfaction which creative work can give to the client (Rubin, 2016).

The practice of art therapy has expanded over the years to include humanistic and other psychotherapy approaches (Rubin, 2016). C. Rogers believed clients have the power to find the best solutions for themselves and to make the changes they need to live in a state of congruency. He held the client in an unconditional positive regard, being empathetic and nonjudgmental. N. Rogers (2016) integrated C. Roger’s person-centered approaches in her client-led expressive arts

therapy. She believed the client leads the art making, the therapist is open, empathetic and honest while facilitating the client's growth.

Also informed by humanistic perspectives, C. Moon (2002) developed a practice of studio art therapy. She describes the importance of a flexible space that can be adapted to different needs. "A sense of 'place' is created not only out of the physical space and material resources but also out of our ability to make use of chance and circumstances as necessary environmental ingredients" (Moon, 2002, p. 70). The studio model recognizes the social context of therapy (Moon, 2002). Moon also stressed the importance of safety, and of relationships.

The action research project was informed by multiple theories, including Kramer's approach of "art as therapy", N. Roger's (2016) expressive arts client-led therapy, and Moon's (2002) studio-based art therapy.

Art Therapy with Youth

Art therapy can be beneficial for adolescents, who are entering a point in their lives where they are attempting to explore their own identity and self-expression. Often, adolescents do not have the words to explain their emotions, thoughts or even actions, but they do have the ability to create art and let art tell their stories. Adolescents are entering a creative time in their lives; art therapy is based on the notion that when creativity is introduced into problem-solving, the art can provide fresh viewpoints and excitement (Riley, 1999). Art therapy tends to feel non-threatening to adolescents.

Art therapy can be beneficial for youth who are experiencing depression, anxiety, addictions or social and emotional needs (Malchiodi, 2007). Youth who suffer from trauma, abuse (emotional, mental, physical or sexual) and addictions may be attempting to block out painful memories of traumatic experiences. Trauma can result in a reorganization of the mind

and brain's perceptions. It impacts not only how we think, and what we do, but our capacity to think (Van Der Kolk, 2014). Art therapy can be used as a tool to slowly and safely process an experience resulting in trauma. Trust and rapport help the adolescent to feel at ease and safe in a session, leading to a positive relationship with the art therapist (Malchiodi, 2007).

Group therapy is another aspect of art therapy that can be beneficial to adolescents. Group art therapy supports one of the developmental needs of adolescence, namely peer grouping (Riley, 1999). As youth develop their identities and connections within the community they belong to, they learn how to connect and engage with others. Group art therapy requires organization, the establishment of trust, confidentiality and the practice of being clear about disclosures and the duty to report (Moon, 2002). A strength of group therapy at school is that it allows the art therapist to reach more students. Establishing art therapy groups with students who share similar mental health concerns is an opportunity to reach a larger number of students more frequently, which promotes improved wellness for more students.

Art Therapy in Schools

Schools have a mandate to educate children. Available research on school art therapy suggests a positive relationship between participation in art therapy and school engagement and learning. School based art therapy helps students cope with psychological distress that impedes academic performance and healthy social emotional development (Berberian, 2017).

In 2008 a team of art therapists conducted a study with Chicago inner-city schools by offering Art Therapy Connection. The ATC therapists used a client-centered art therapy approach with students to develop social skills, group identity, group cohesion and cooperation (Sutherland, 2010). When the researchers compared graduation rates from 2007 to 2008, they found that “78% of the students in ATC graduated from high school, whereas the graduation rate

for the entire student body was 56%” (Sutherland, 2010, p.73). They correlated the students’ engagement in ATC with an improvement in attendance, adjustment and academic achievements. The students’ sense of pride and accomplishment transferred into their academics.

A school in Winnipeg found success offering an eight-week girls group called Healthy Girls. Healthy Young Women (n.d.). They used art therapy in group counselling to explore past, present and future selves. Due to the nature of the girls’ home lives and family commitments of childcare, the group was conducted during school hours. The girls responded positively to the project. An advocate for art therapy in schools, Keane (2017) describes how as schools are ever changing, and comprised of students with diverse needs, art therapy offers an opportunity to restore health and well-being as well as self-efficacy. She suggests that art making can be an outlet for anxiety or aggression.

Art therapy can help achieve academic and emotional reconstruction. When students experience academic, social or emotional challenges, art therapy has been shown to have positive outcomes including improved self-concept, social interactions with students, cooperation, problem solving abilities, increased self-esteem and efficacy and decreased disruptive behaviors (Berberian, 2017).

Art Therapy and Resiliency

Art therapy can be used as a resource to help promote resiliency within at-risk youth. In a review of literature on resilience and art therapy, Worrall and Jerry (2007) discussed how creativity can be a mechanism through which people can become resilient to trauma. They advocated that art therapists can aid their clients to tap into already-existing strengths and resiliencies in order to increase the healing process. Two studies about art and resiliency found that participants in art therapy and creative / visual arts groups developed a sense of belonging

and ability to cope with difficult feelings (Macpherson, Hart & Heaver, 2015; Goldblatt, 2018), as well as increased self-worth, confidence, motivation and other resilience factors (Goldblatt, 2018).

Creating Space for Art Therapy

The term ‘studio art therapy’ is at times used interchangeably with ‘art as therapy’ or an ‘art-based approach to art therapy’ (Moon, 2002). Schools can lend themselves to cultivating a space that is safe and welcoming. Students tend to be familiar with schools and the designs of classrooms, even if they are set up differently, perhaps as a studio. A sense of ‘place’ is created not only out of the physical space and material resources but by the intentionality of the space (Moon, 2002). Moon’s perspective on using the space you are given and the opportunities it may provide, is similar to Malchiodi’s (2007) statement about how the space influences how participants perceive the art therapist. The importance of safety and containment within a designated space is imperative to art therapy and impacts the relationship between a therapist and a client. “Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives” (Van Der Kolk, 2014, p. 79).

Non-Indigenous Art Therapists Working with Indigenous People

Weinberg, who researched relationships of non-Indigenous art therapists with Indigenous youth, advocates that “Art therapists need to connect with Indigenous peoples’ history and trauma in order to better understand their worldview” (Weinberg, 2018). It is important for non-Indigenous art therapists to understand how systemic oppression and racism have contributed significantly to intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous people. They need to learn about historical trauma, the residential school system, and the Sixties Scoop (the removal of

Indigenous children from their families into foster and adoptive homes in the 1960s. As well, it is important to create relationships with local Indigenous communities, in efforts to decolonize their practice (Vivian, 2013; Weinberg, 2018).

Weinberg's (2018) research also reinforces the importance of respectful understanding of culture in establishing strong trusting relationships. Art therapy with Indigenous people must also acknowledge the strength and healing potential within their philosophies, beliefs, and cultural practices, while dismantling stereotypes and reframing the negative impact of colonialism (Weinberg, 2018). It is equally important for art therapists to make connections within the community where they are practicing, to know the land they are on, and to be cautious not to pan-indigenize their clients. For non-Indigenous therapists it is essential to work in collaboration with an Indigenous mentor, co-therapist, or clinical supervisor for culturally-specific guidance and to inform insights related to client behavior and vocabulary affiliated to specific Indigenous cultures (Weinberg, 2018).

Summary

The literature review supports the need for Indigenous perspectives to be considered in practicing art therapy. Art has been healing for centuries within Indigenous cultures. Intergeneration trauma has impacted Indigenous youth today. Mental health and wellbeing are being recognized as an issue schools need to act on. Art therapy can be used to promote resiliency among at risk youth and can be offered in public schools. Art therapy has evolved as a practice and continues to offer solutions for problems facing youth today. As it continues to evolve and be offered, art therapists must be cognizant of their clientele's culture. Non-Indigenous art therapists have a responsibility to inform themselves of the wrongdoings of

colonization and residential schools and the effects that are still impacting today's generation of youth.

Methodology

An action research model was used to explore how art therapy can be integrated with the Circle of Courage model to promote resiliency among Indigenous youth in an alternative high school. The action research project involved five Indigenous female students in a series of six group art therapy sessions.

The action research was informed by Indigenous research perspectives. Given the history and often negative impacts of Indigenous people being researched by non-Indigenous researchers (Wilson, 2008), I was mindful about focusing on researching the process of the art therapy group and not the participants. Relationships are key to research, and everything needs to be seen within the context of the relationships they represent. The concepts and the ideas are not as important as the relationships that went into forming them. Relationship building is viewed as being an important ethical aspect of Indigenous research and "relationality" is the foundation for Indigenous inquiry (Wilson, 2008).

Whether a researcher is Indigenous or non-Indigenous, mutual respect is important. Wilson (2008) refers to this process as relational accountability and cautions researchers to be accountable to all our relations, to make careful choices in our selection of research topics, our methods of data collection and forms of data analysis, and in the way that we present data.

Relationships between the researcher and the participants and among the participants were foundational to this action research project. During the project, I consulted with the school Knowledge Keeper and I learned with the participants about their cultures.

Action Research

Action research seeks to create social change and empowerment through gaining knowledge with research participants (Kapitan, 2018). Kapitan (2018) identifies three purposes of change: “to change or improve one’s practice; to change or improve one’s understanding of practice; and to change or improve the situations and environments in which one’s practice takes place” (p. 156). I anticipated that the research would inform my practice and understanding of art therapy. I also hoped that that the research would show one way to include art therapy in the school, which could in turn increase youth’s access to mental health supports.

Potash and Kalmanowitz (2016) identified three important steps that separate action research from other forms of research: (1) the work should be centered on a community that has traditionally been exploited or marginalized; (2) the research should address community concerns and causes of oppression; and (3) the process should be considered educational, in which all participants are able to contribute and learn. These steps were addressed in this action research project. It was conducted in an alternative public high school where many of the students experience intergenerational trauma and related challenges. The community is concerned about the effects of intergenerational trauma on their youth, especially the high rates of addictions, depression, and anxiety. This concern was expressed in community sharing circles, as well as in individual conversations with social workers, educators, and youth sectors in the community. The action research process was inclusive of the needs, interests, and contributions of the participants.

Art therapy and action research. Art therapy, as an element of action research, can be used to challenge institutional norms by empowering a community to ask questions, uncover answers, and disseminate findings in order to better a situation (Potash & Kalmanowitz, 2016).

In action research, as in art therapy, the participants are a part of the planning process.

Participants in this project were asked how they would like to work on each aspect of the Circle of Courage. They had input into the art processes chosen.

Action research process. A key features of action research is the iterative process of - Act - > Evaluate - > Reflect-> Act (Kapitan, 2018). In the following report on the research, I describe the project (Action), findings (Evaluation) and include reflections about the project. It was not possible to continue the art therapy group and project due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, recommendations for future inquiry and action are included.

Ethical Considerations and Biases

I am a white, middle aged, straight, cis gender woman. My biases include a value of school engagement and academic purpose, and an emphasis on relationships as a key component in my teaching, art therapy and research. I assessed, reviewed and reflected about my biases in interpreting and presenting the information obtained throughout the action research process. I reflected through dialogue with colleagues and during regular ongoing supervision with my art therapy supervisor. Although I had prior knowledge about some of the participants' experiences, I set this aside as I attended to their experiences in the here and now in the art therapy group.

I am in a position of power within the context of the school environment, as a guidance counsellor, art therapist and student researcher. I was very aware of my role and I tried to encourage participant-led processes. I did not want the participants to feel as though they had to produce something, as they may have felt in a traditional art class. The participants had been in individual art therapy before gathering as a group. In these sessions they completed art processes depending on their interests. It was important to create a safe and contained space where mutual respect was fostered. We have a trauma informed approach to our school community. We value

each student for who they are and the gifts they bring. Relationships are key to establishing respect.

Another aspect to consider throughout this project was that the participants are Indigenous, and I am not. The research was designed around the Circle of Courage, an Indigenous model that is recognized within the local Indigenous community, as well as by our provincial school system. I consulted with the school's Indigenous Knowledge Keeper, and regularly checked in with the participants about how their culture and identity would be presented in the art processes. I acknowledged my own culture when asked about it by the participants.

Consent and confidentiality. The participants' parents or guardians signed consent for the students to participate in the group and research (see appendices one and two), the participants knew that the focus of the research was on how to promote resiliency through artwork around the Circle of Courage. Participants signed consent forms and were reminded of the research project every session. They were aware that data was being collected through surveys, notes and art processes. Participants' names and identifying aspects were omitted from the research findings; pseudonyms were used instead. Geographical descriptions were removed to protect confidentiality of the students and the school.

Method

Participants

Five Indigenous female students, aged 14 to 16, who attended the alternative high school participated in this action research. They had previously participated in individual or group art therapy with me. I asked these five based on two criteria: willingness to participate in group art therapy sessions, and willingness to attend regularly. Attendance is a challenge for most of the

students attending the school, but due to the nature of the project, it was important to have participants who were committed to attending all sessions.

The Art Therapy Group

Setting. The project setting was a classroom, which was also my office. The classroom was away from the high school classes. This was designed for some privacy, however it was still accessible to other students and staff, so privacy wasn't always assured. The school secretary and principal were aware of our group art therapy project and when we were meeting. This did help to prevent interruptions. From time to time, there would be an interruption with an announcement over the intercom. The participants were not bothered by this, as they were used to the school environment.

The intention of the space was to be welcoming, safe and contained. The room has couches near a window, tables and chairs arranged in a circle, as well as some extra tables and seating around the classroom. There was open access shelving and cupboards full of art supplies. The participants could select art materials and select music or listen to their own music. Snacks and drinks were available. They did not have to ask permission to leave the room to use the bathroom. The participants were invited to use the space as they felt comfortable.

The weekly sessions. Participants met for two hours a week over a six-week period. Each session focused on an element of the Circle of Courage namely: Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity. The sessions on Mastery and Independence each continued over two weeks.

To begin each session, I invited students to participate in a guided meditation based on the week's theme, followed by an opening sharing circle. The sharing circle was an opportunity for participants to explore the topic in relation to their experiences. It was also an opportunity to

create a sense of belonging to the group. The participants knew the format of the sessions and could contribute as they chose to. The participants then created art based on theme. The group ended with a closing circle. In the closing circle the participants shared their art processes and any reflections or insights they had into their work.

Art making in the sessions included self-portraits (Belonging), beading (Mastery), self-directed art (Independence) and self-directed art created at home during school closure for someone else (Generosity). The participants were familiar with the studio space and often gathered ideas online. Their art processes were their own; as the researcher, I did not interfere with this process. Some participants worked on their art between sessions. This was not discouraged, because the group members all attended school together and had access to their artwork when they were not scheduled for class.

Participants were encouraged to contribute ideas for creating art based on the Circle of Courage model. For example, they chose to learn to bead and had choice over what they created. The participants took most of their artwork home except for the self-portraits which they decided to display in the classroom. With the students' permission, I took digital images of their art and downloaded them onto a password protected computer.

Data Collection

Data included a pre- and post- session survey, digital images of participants' art and anecdotal notes about the students' art making and their discussion about it.

Surveys. The surveys included five statements for each of the four parts of the Circle of Courage (Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity). The sets of statements were developed by Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern (1990) and reflected feelings and thoughts related to each part (e.g., I feel supported in my life). Participants were asked to indicate their

experience of each statement on a scale from “none of the time” to “all of the time”. The survey included space for comments (See appendix 3).

Participants completed the pre-session survey at the start of the first session. There was a short discussion about the topic in each part of the circle so that participants could ask for clarification if needed. When it was clear that they all understood the topics, I handed out the surveys and the participants completed them.

Because of the Covid-19 related school closures, participants could not meet and complete the post-session survey until after the school re-opened, five and a half months after it had closed. The post-session survey was completed in the same manner as the pre-session survey. The participants gathered (physically distanced and within Covid-19 restrictions) and referred back to the digital images of the art they had completed during the art therapy group sessions. They were asked to reflect on the art when they responded to the statements.

Participants filled out the surveys anonymously and we did not discuss their responses. I collected the surveys, collated the responses electronically and stored them on a password protected school computer and stored the surveys in a locked cabinet.

Notes. Notes were part of my reflective process after the session was complete. During the session my focus was on the participants and art making. I did not want to distract from their processes by taking notes in front of them. I was conscious about not making them feel they were being researched, more that the process was being researched. When the participants left, I noted comments about how they were feeling towards the group, their art processes and themselves. This allowed me to reflect on themes that occurred throughout the project. I kept notes in a locked cabinet.

Data analysis

The survey data was collated electronically by tallying up responses and collating them electronically into charts. These were stored on a password protected computer. Notes from each session were reviewed for themes and commonalities across the sessions. I reviewed the students' art in relation to the notes but did not analyze their images.

Participants' Art Processes and Reflections

The following descriptions are based on my notes and observations of the group art therapy sessions. They provide a holistic context for later discussion of themes. All of the images are as the students created them, except for covering a name for confidentiality. I used pseudonyms to personalize the descriptions and maintaining confidentiality.

Circle of Courage: Belonging Art Processes

This session introduced the theme of belonging. We started the session with a sharing circle, the participants stated what belonging meant to them. The participants indicated there were times they did not feel they belonged. They were given the opportunity to share those feelings before they started to create their pieces. The participants discussed how they would create a collaborative piece and decided to create self-portraits. They felt they wanted to do something that would represent them as individuals but that could be displayed as a group piece.

Macy and Hailey acknowledged the importance of different accessories in their artwork. Macy indicated that glasses are important; the character believes glasses help make her who she is (Figure 1). Hailey included the toque because the character always wears it at school (Figure 2). The toque is symbolic to her, because at her last school, she was not allowed to wear it. Sarah and Cora used color to illustrate different parts of self. Sarah noted she feels hot and cold (Figure 3). The red illustrates when anxiety creeps up on her; she can feel it in her shoulders

first. Additionally, she often feels blue Cora (Figure 4) noted how two colors represent the character, indicating that sometimes there are two sides to her—the person everyone sees and the person no one sees. She does not like to talk about herself.



Figure 1 Macy



Figure 2 Hailey



Figure 3 Sarah



Figure 4 Cora

Each participant had their own process for choosing colors to paint with. The group decided together that they would all paint their hair black, because it is a similarity they share. Carrie described the face in Figure 5 as depicting a sunset, because it reminded her of her home community. She spoke of often feeling alone in her life. She stated that after the guided meditation on belonging, the one place she felt like she did belong was at home, even though it was not a safe place.



Figure 5 Carrie

Circle of Courage: Mastery Art Processes

This session introduced the theme of mastery. Prior to the session the participants were asked what type of cultural skill they would like to learn. The students requested beading. They knew the sessions would be more technical in learning the skill but also that they would have choice around what they created.

For this session, a Cree Knowledge Keeper was invited to the school to teach the participants how to bead, with the virtue of mastery focusing on skills learned under the guidance of a skilled beader. Beading is a traditional skill for the Indigenous people in the area, and the participants in the group all have Cree and Metis heritage. The participants chose what to create, along with colors and design.

Carrie used the colors of a medicine wheel to create her piece. She said she wanted to create something she could wear to summer powwows (Figure 6).



Figure 6

Hailey and Cora also chose to incorporate feathers into their creations (Figures 7 and 8). The Knowledge Keeper talked about how eagle feathers are a symbol of good luck in their teachings. Hailey noted that she chose to include the feathers for that reason. However, she voiced some hesitation about whether she would feel comfortable actually wearing the earrings. Cora shared the emotion: “I might feel shy because they are like the earrings Elders wear, but I will wear them because I made them.”



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

The artwork depicted in Figure 9 and Figure 10 took longer to create than earrings, with both participants saying they wanted to learn to bead so they could stitch their work onto hide. The participants did spend time working on their beading outside of the group sessions. Sarah created a turtle because she always liked turtles, noting that they are strong and can live an exceptionally long time. She said she hoped for the same life. Macy beaded roses for a pair of moccasins that she was going to ask her Kookum (grandmother) to sew. Macy chose a rose because roses reminded her of her Kookum. She wanted to honor her somehow.

Circle of Courage: Independence Art Processes

This session introduced the theme of Independence. The participants were asked what independence meant to them. By this session the participants were more comfortable as a group and shared their feelings and perspectives more openly. The participants all enjoyed the process of free artmaking; they were familiar with the process from sessions in individual art therapy.

The group decided that if an individual chose to work on their art during their own time or individual sessions, they could.

Cora worked on her piece outside of the allotted group session. She created a replica of a clothing brand logo (Figure 11). The logo itself does not hold any significance to Cora, who said she simply wanted artwork for her bedroom. However, at one point, she did say she likes the idea of a powerful chief. She acknowledged that she knows little about her culture and that what she knows is what she has learned or experienced through opportunities at school.



Figure 11

Macy created the image in Figure 12 because she likes the anime style of drawing, and this drawing is one she had seen before. Macy would often carry around a book illustrating how to draw anime characters. She commented that she



Figure 12

prefers using Copic markers (an alcohol-based marker that blends easily) and she was working on perfecting the skin tone. Macy commented often about how when she was a child, she hated that her skin was so dark compared to her peers. She recalled being teased, especially at the beginning of a school year, because her skin had darkened after spending time in the sun over the summer months.

The topic of race often came up during the group sessions when culture was discussed. The participants shared how being Indigenous was not always something they wanted people to know about them. This was due to racism they had experienced within the community, from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. They shared this perspective from their own experiences. Hailey one time commented she was not brown enough for her cousins or white enough for her friends. She wished she were just seen for who she was, not the color of her skin.

To create the portrait (Figure 13) Sarah worked freehand, then on her iPod. Sarah created this piece in memory of her friend who was murdered. She worked on this piece quietly and did not talk about it very much. Everyone in the group respected her privacy and gave her space.

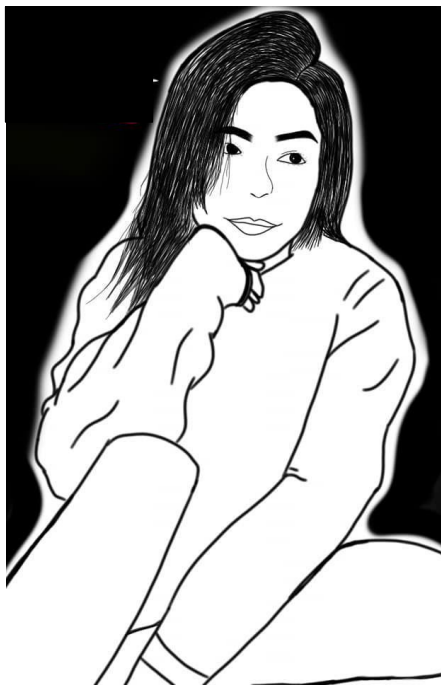


Figure 13



Figure 14

Figure 14 was modeled after an image Hailey had seen and liked. When Cora asked if Hailey was the figure in the painting, she responded, “I think it’s just two people walking into the future together. I like bright colors. I like the idea of not being alone. It is trippy. The future you

know. Nobody knows what the future holds. I did not think I would even be here today. So, who knows where I will be in the future?”



Figure 15

Carrie also based her image on one she had seen online (Figure 15). She said it reminded her of home. Her community is on the Canadian Shield, and she saw herself connected to the land. She did note that she usually draws people in the anime style, but this style reminded her more of Native artwork. She chose it because she wanted something that represented her more.

It was clear that all of the participants appreciated having a choice about what they could create, however, it was interesting that they all sought out images to replicate in some way. This is common with the youth in other art therapy sessions. They care about the product. They engage in the process, but the product does matter to them. They either want to take it home, give it away or have it displayed in some way at school.

Circle of Courage: Generosity Art Processes

The virtue of Generosity was not discussed in the same format as the other virtues because at this point in the group art therapy project, schools were closed due to Covid-19. We were unsure about when they would reopen. Prior to the school closure, the participants had discussed what they could do for others as a group. One idea was to create sidewalk chalk art in

the community, which possibly was wishful thinking in northern Canada in March. Other ideas were to create art for others, such as kindness rocks and beaded earrings for family and friends.

After the school closed, the participants in the group were in contact with me throughout the closure. They were asked to create art in some way for someone else as part of the last piece of the Circle of Courage model, generosity. One student didn't have access to Wi-Fi, so she didn't have much contact with me during that time. The other students sent me pictures of the art they created.

Macy and Sarah created images for friends. Macy drew a friend (Figure 16), and Sarah created a poster for a friend to carry during a Black Lives Matter (BLM) march (Figure 17). The march was organized by Indigenous youth in solidarity with the BLM movement.



Figure 16

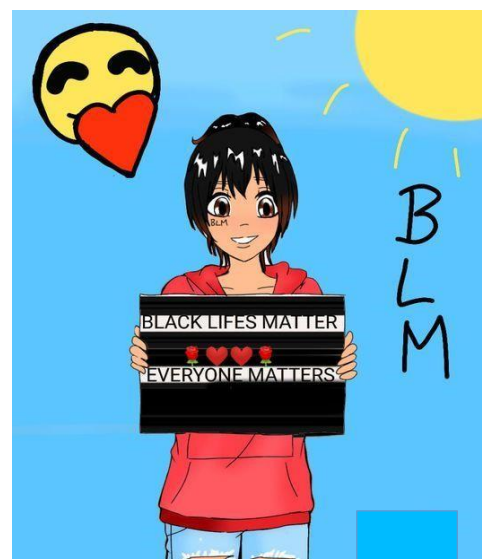


Figure 17

Cora and Hailey created art pieces with positive messages to post in windows (Figure 18 and 19). Both Cora and Hailey created their art to get involved in the community and as a way to express their thanks to essential workers. When asked about their artwork, they did not have any comments about the work itself, just that they felt they could give back in a small way.



Figure 18



Figure 19

Survey Results

As noted, the surveys asked student to rate their feelings on five statements related to belonging, and to include comments about how they felt before embarking on this research project and after they resumed together to debrief their reflections. The following summarizes responses to the statements in the pre- and post- session statements. Comments are included in the summary of themes.

Belonging (Table 1)

The survey results on Belonging indicate a positive shift in responses on all of the statements. For instance, there was a decrease in the number of times a student or students responded “none of the time”, “rarely” or “some of the time” to the statements. No students marked “none of the time” or “rarely” in the second survey. There was an increase in the number of “often” responses. Whereas one or two students responded “often” in the pre-session survey, four or all five students responded “often” to statements in the second survey.

Table 1

Statements on Belonging	None of the time		Rarely		Some of the time		Often		All of the time	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
I feel supported in my life.	1		1		3	1		4		
I feel attached to other people.	1		1		3			5		
I feel loved.	1				3	1	1	4		
I trust other people.	2		1		2			5		
I work well with others.	1				3		1	5		
Total	6		3		14	2	2	23		

Mastery (Table 2)

The survey results on Mastery suggest a positive shift in responses on all of the statements. Notably, although no students responded “often” to any statements in the first survey, all of the participants responded “often” to “I feel like I am good at something” and “I feel like I am creative.” Further, no students marked “none of the time” in the post-session’s survey.

Table 2

Statements on Mastery	None of the time		Rarely		Some of the time		Often		All of the time	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
I feel like I am good at something.	1		1		3			5		
I feel like I am creative.	1		2		2			5		
I feel motivated.	1		4	1		2		2		
If I fail, I try again.	1		4	1		2		2		
I like to challenge myself.	2		3			2		3		
TOTAL	6		14	2	5	6		17		

Independence (Table 3)

The survey results indicate a positive shift in responses to all of the statements. While most of the students responded “none of the time” or “rarely” to the statements on the first survey, none gave this response on the post-session survey. All of the participants indicated they felt “I am responsible” “often” in the post surveys. As well, four students responded “often” to “I can take the lead in my life”.

Table 3

Statements on Independence	None of the time		Rarely		Some of the time		Often		All of the time	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
I feel like I have choice in my life.	2		1		2	2		3		
I am responsible.	1		3				1	5		
I have inner control.	1		3			2	1	3		
I can take the lead in my life.	1		3				1	5		
I am self-disciplined.	1		3			1	1	4		
Total	6		13		2	5	4	20		

Generosity (Table 4)

The survey results indicate a smaller shift in responses to statements about generosity. Student’s responses to the statements in the pre-session survey suggested they had more positive feelings or thoughts about their generosity than about the other topics. Almost all of the participants responded “some of the time” or “often” in the pre-session survey with the exception of one “rarely” response for the statement “I like to be around other people.” However, there were no “rarely” responses in the post-sessions survey and increase in “some of the time”, “often” and “all of the time” responses.

Table 4

Statements on Generosity	None of the time		Rarely		Some of the time		Often		All of the time	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
I am kind.					2		3	5		
I share with others.					2		3	5		
I support others.					2		3	4		1
I am empathetic.					2		3	5		
I like to be around other people.			1		3		1	2		3
Total			1		11		13	21		4

Themes

I reviewed all of the data to identify themes related to the Circle of Courage. I noted themes related to Belonging, Mastery, Generosity and Kindness, along with some other themes that also relate to resiliency, including personal and cultural identities, sharing experiences, meaning and purpose, and hope.

Belonging

All the participants talked about how they felt at times they did not belong with family, friends, school and the community as whole. This was confounded by attending an alternative school in the local community. There is a stigma attached to being rejected from the mainstream school system. These feelings were reflected in the pre-session survey.

Over the sessions I observed a growing level of engagement and comfort in the group. In the beginning the participants were quiet and did not speak much to one another. They did not often share personal insights or opinions. As they spent more time together, they developed a relationship. The participants all had an existing relationship with the researcher/art therapist, but

not with each other. There was a sense of trust and willingness to participate freely. The participants looked forward to coming together as a group.

In the post-sessions sharing group each student said the group was one of the aspects they missed most about school. They said they felt a sense of belonging in the group. They said that making art on their own at home was not quite the same as in the group, and that they wanted the group sessions to continue. Survey comments included “missing doing art with the group”, “wanting to see people again, being so happy to be back at school and hoping to be able to gather as a group again” and wanting to complete the project as we had initially discussed. In the survey results there was positive shift towards feelings related to belonging,

Identities. The theme of identities included individual identities and cultural identities. The students frequently discussed how they saw themselves in sessions and this was the focus they chose for their art in the first session. Although the students included individual characteristics in their portraits, they also decided to all paint their hair black, as this was something they had in common. One of the students shared how she wanted people to see her for herself rather than for the colour of her skin.

All the students were Indigenous but not all were connected to their culture. There were times that shame of not knowing their culture came up in discussion. However, as they created beadwork, they felt connected to their culture as well as feeling proud that they had learned a new skill. During the sessions, one of the participants created an image that reminded her of her home community and of being connected to the land.

Sharing experiences. Prompted by their art making, participants talked about experiences of racism and shame. This gave the participants the opportunity to see they are not alone. Sharing their experiences helped foster a sense of belonging to the group.

Mastery

During the sessions, participants expressed that they felt some shame in being referred to an alternative school. Some indicated they felt they were not smart, others felt they were bad. The students' confidence in their artwork shifted when their first art process collaboration came together. They felt their creation was "cool" and represented each of their own uniqueness. Their confidence continued to grow as they learned the art of beading from the Knowledge Keeper. They were so happy with their new skill.

When they saw their art after a period of time, they indicated that they felt they were good at something and that they had learned a new skill, namely beading. They were proud of all the artwork they had created. The surveys indicated a shift in how they felt about creating their art. The participants all indicated that they often felt like they were good at something and that they were creative.

Independence

When the participants were given the opportunity to create their own artwork with whatever materials they chose, they all focused on their own pieces. There was not a lot of dialogue during the art making. The participants all chose different mediums to work with, watercolor, digital art, acrylic on canvas and alcohol-based markers. The participants made light of how art supplies are usually off limits in the classroom. Participants also worked independently on their art making related to generosity.

In the post-session surveys, reflecting back on their artwork, all of the participants indicated that they felt they could take the lead in their own life in terms of decision making. There was also a shift to more positive responses of feeling that they were more responsible.

Generosity

The participants all worked independently on the aspect of generosity. This is an area that all the participants felt at least some of the time they were kind, supportive of others and empathetic in the pre-session surveys. The participants wanted to make art for others in the beginning of the group, then continued to make the art even when the group was halted because of the school closure. There was still a shift in the post-session survey to feeling this way often.

Meaning and Purpose

When school resumed, the participants unanimously agreed that art had helped them during the pandemic. They said it gave them something to do and to focus on. I asked if art making gave them a sense of meaning and purpose and they all said it did. Participants described challenges they had during school closure, including depression, poor sleeping patterns, anxiety, family, relationships and housing worries. They all said that art was something that improved their mood and connected them to someone other than themselves.

Hope. In reviewing their art, two talked about the future and possibilities. This suggests a sense of hope. Hope for themselves and hope for each other. The sense of hope grew over the session.

The Importance of Art Making

Students' art and their reflections during the sessions suggest that art making offered a way for students to express and reflect about aspects of resilience and about themselves. Students also commented about the importance of art making for them. Several indicated that art was the only part of the pandemic that made them feel like themselves. One participant clearly stated that making art calmed her anxiety and fears about the unknown and made her feel normal when she was creating it.

Validity and Limitations

The validity of the action research has to be considered. According to Kapitan (2018), “research must have a validation process; in action research, it is not enough to critique and resolve the contradictions of practice but to involve others in validating the results” (p.160).

Demonstrating validity in research can be done by obtaining information across different sources and perspectives to present a diverse and comprehensive report. In terms of the literature review, the research came from credible sources including peer reviewed articles, published journal articles and published books from experts in the field of art therapy, psychotherapy, resiliency, and education. Data included surveys, participants’ art and discussion and my observations and notes. I consulted with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, my art therapy supervisor and advisor. I reviewed a draft of the art process and reflections with the student participants. They expressed agreement with what I had written and included.

This research project had a small number participants and there was a five month gap between when participants completed the pre- and post- session surveys. As with other action research projects, the results are not generalizable, however they can inform practice. It is not possible to show causation between group art therapy and increased resilience among the participants. However, the results suggest that there was a shift in participants’ perceptions of aspects of their resilience, even five months after the art therapy group had ended,

Learnings and Reflections

In the beginning of this research project, I was trying to wrap my head around what I wanted to do and what I hoped to show. First, I wanted to focus on the students that I worked with daily. I wanted the research to be valuable to the students, to be culturally appropriate and to enhance their well-being.

I also wanted to start a dialogue around school-based art therapy. Art therapy is new to my school and my community. When I started my position as guidance counselor, it was usual in my area to refer students with mental health challenges to out of school resources. I advocated that some of these challenges could be met in school, through art therapy. I also wanted to clarify that art therapy is a form of therapy and not just “doing art with the counsellor.” I wanted to enhance credibility to the area of art therapy and of trained art therapists in my province.

Results of the action research project suggest that the project did contribute to participants’ well-being. Awareness and understanding about art therapy also increased in the school staff’s view of art as healing. The teachers and support staff started to incorporate art to build classroom community. As well, I expanded my understanding of resilience and of art therapy.

Resilience

Through the project I started to form a deepened understanding of resiliency. Resilience is supported when individuals have access to resources they need (Ungar, 2013). From previous work with the students in the school, I understood that students could benefit from resources and supports to help strengthen their resilience. Through the project, I have reflected that resilience, and aspects of resilience, like wellness, are on a continuum, from minimal to optimal. The students in the project were resilient. They each had a trauma history. They were attending an alternative school because they were not regular attenders at their previous schools, however they showed up at school and for the project against all odds. My observations and the pre-and post-surveys suggest that the students experienced a shift from less optimum to more optimum in how they viewed themselves in relation to aspects of resilience.

Art therapy and Resilience

My understanding of how art therapy can promote resiliency grew throughout my reading and writing for the literature review. Through the research, I found that doing the art allowed for the sense of belonging, the ability to choose, the ability to learn and the ability to give back—to help foster a sense of resilience. Creating art supported expression, reflection and sharing of thoughts and feelings. I also think that creating art together promoted resiliency. The process of creating art around identity within a group created the sense of belonging. The group art therapy offered opportunities for the participants to form new connections with peers in their school community. I found that the process of art making contributed to their overall well-being, especially when school was closed. The participants stayed connected with me, through creating art during the pandemic. When schools reopened, they wanted to return to school but more so to come back together as an art therapy group. This, to me, indicated building resiliency and that the art itself helped to develop it.

Cultural Awareness

There are various discussions happening in academia and in the world of mental health about the importance of having Indigenous helpers to work with Indigenous clients. Working on this project reinforced my agreement with this idea. I believe that if there is an Indigenous helper available, they should be accessible for Indigenous clients. In the case where there are not Indigenous helpers, the non-Indigenous helper, in this case art therapist, needs to be aware of the needs of their clients. This can be done through collaboration with community members, Elders, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and artists. The art therapy should be client led. It is important not to assume the wants and needs of Indigenous clients. In my experience, all my clients have been Indigenous, but they are not necessarily traditional. They want to be seen for who they are,

not who others think they should be. This means that they should have choice in exploring their cultures and identities. I have been able to incorporate appropriate traditional Indigenous ceremonies and art into my practice through working with Elders and Knowledge Keepers. I have learned and incorporated a sharing circle, smudging, feasting, and traditional art making into my practice. From my teachings these are ceremonial and can be done by me. Ceremonies beyond this should be facilitated by an appropriate Elder or Knowledge Keeper. It is imperative that I continue to reach out to the communities I am working with; connections and collaboration help create a safe welcoming art therapy space.

Further Research

I wonder if the project would have had the same results if we had just done beading. Or, if the students only did self-directed art, would they have felt the same connections? These are some questions for future research. The process of action research allows for questioning the process, questioning the results and looking at it from different perspectives. Going forward there could be more research on exploring identities through art. The participants were Indigenous and incorporating culture was important. However, the participants were also teenagers and exploring who they were in this modern world. They were influenced by media, with anime and manga art, social activism, and brands. How can art therapy facilitate walking in both worlds?

Conclusion

The action research project offers an example of how art therapy can be integrated in schools using the Circle of Courage model to promote resiliency among Indigenous youth. The results from this project indicate that there was a shift from less optimum to more optimum in students' thoughts and feelings related to all aspects of the Circle of Courage after participating

in the group art therapy sessions. Art therapy can be a resource in public schools to promote resiliency in at-risk youth. This project indicates that students responded positively to group art therapy during school hours; the student participants would like to continue with group art therapy.

The action research project built on my learning through art therapy courses, literature readings, through discussions with others, including Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers., and through offering individual art therapy sessions in my practicum program. Through these different experiences I have broadened my perspective of the value of art therapy, especially the value of school-based art therapy and culturally diverse art therapy, specifically Indigenized art therapy through a Settler lens.

Personal Art Response

The art process is a compilation of the group art therapy research project. The self-portrait emulates the art the participants created. The colours represent the honor and gratitude I felt reflecting on the process.

The birch represent the participants and the growth they demonstrated throughout the process. Birch trees grow clusters in the forests in my region. They represent strength the



participant's resilience. Birch trees can grow strong and tall even in harsh climates: cold winters and wet or dry summers. They provide strength and protection to all relations; people, animals and plants.

The beadwork is representative of learning from the participants and the Indigenous Knowledge Keeper. Pieces that represent me, my connection to the land and to the North. The strawberry acknowledging the heart, the love, the care I put into the work I do. The blueberries representing how the land nourishes all of our spirit and gives strength and humility. Blueberries are hardy and can help you survive but they don't always come in abundance. So many factors play into their growth. But in the right season, with adequate sun and rain – resources – they can grow in abundance. Resilience happens with the right conditions – Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity. When you have a good crop of berries you can share with your community.

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Appendix 1



ART/ EXPRESSIVE ARTS THERAPY CONSENT FORM – Minors

Agency/School/Hospital _____

I, _____ (Parent/Guardian) agree that _____

(Minors' name) may participate in the practicum by the student of the Winnipeg Holistic Expressive Arts Therapy Institute Inc. (WHEAT Institute) from _____ (date) to _____ (date).

1. I give permission for the WHEAT Institute student therapist, their supervisor, the Practicum Coordinator and Director to contact and meet with the agency with whom he/she/they is receiving the art therapy service in order to best meet their needs as a client and ensure their safety.
2. I give permission for his//her/their art to be photographed for inclusion in his/her/their client file and shown to on-site designated professionals, as well as the WHEAT Institute therapy supervisor.
3. I understand that the information will be kept anonymous; he/she/they will not be identified by name, address, or any other specific information.
4. I authorize the student at the WHEAT Institute to maintain record of the art and/or drama work.
5. I further authorize that these records and disguised client information may be shared for educational or research purposes.
6. I **agree / do not agree** (circle one) that a session may be videotaped for the purpose of student learning. I understand that these recordings will be erased after supervision.
7. I understand that the ownership of the original artwork/theatrical work remains with him/her/they.
8. I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time.

Limits of Confidentiality:

I understand that all information will be kept confidential unless:

- there is a threat of bodily harm to self or others
- there is indication of child and/or elder abuse
- the information is requested by subpoena for court purposes.

Signed: _____ (Parent/Guardian) Date: _____

Relationship to Client: _____

WHEAT Institute Student: _____ (signature) Date: _____

Appendix 2

January 15, 2020

Dear Parent/ Guardian

This letter is being sent home to invite your child to participate in a research project with our school's Guidance Counsellor, Marcia Novo. Marcia is completing her training for the Art Therapy Diploma program at Winnipeg Holistic Expressive Arts Therapy Institute in Winnipeg, MB.

The students will participate in a 6-week program where they will attend Group Art Therapy sessions for 2 hours a week. The purpose of the research is to explore school-based art therapy and resiliency among Indigenous youth.

The students will be allowed to take home their artwork that they create. There will be images taken of the artwork and shared in the research project. If at any time the student wishes to withdraw from the research project they can.

Please review the consent form and return it signed for your child to participate. If you have signed this consent form before, you are asked to resubmit for this research project.

If there are any questions or concerns, please contact Marcia Novo at [Name of School]

Phone # 1 (204) 623 1420

Email: mnovo@ksd.mb.ca

Sincerely.

Marcia Novo

Appendix 3

Circle of Courage Art Therapy Group and Research Project

Pre Survey: Resiliency

1. Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts. Please choose the answer that best describes your experience of each statement.

Statements on Belonging	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I feel supported in my life.					
I feel attached to other people.					
I feel loved.					
I trust other people.					
I work well with others.					
Statements on Mastery	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I feel like I am good at something.					
I feel like I am creative.					
I feel motivated.					
If I fail, I try again.					
I like to challenge myself.					
Statements on Independence	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I feel like I have choice in my life.					
I am responsible.					
I have inner control.					
I can take the lead in my life.					
I am self-disciplined.					

Statements on Generosity	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I am kind.					
I share with others.					
I support others.					
I am empathetic					
I like to be around other people.					

2. Below are some more questions about where you feel different aspects of the Circle of Courage. Please check all that apply to you.

Circle of Courage	Home	School	Community
Belonging			
“I am loved”			
Mastery			
“I can succeed”			
Independence			
“I have the power to make decisions”			
Generosity			
“I have a purpose for my life”			

3. Do you have any comments you would like to add?