



From Detention to Expression: A Case Study on Fostering Adolescents' Artistic Liberation

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Abstract

This paper investigates the impact of fine arts on literacy development, personal growth, and social integration among adolescents in a juvenile detention facility. Through a qualitative case study involving two participants, "Strummer" and "Fretwell," we explored how engagement in a guitar club could reshape their perceptions of literacy and influence their social identities. Our findings highlight significant transformations in the students' confidence, resilience, and educational engagement, underscoring the pivotal role of music in fostering a dynamic understanding of literacy and enhancing personal and social growth. The integration of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Third Space theories into our methodological approach provided a novel perspective on the potential of arts-integrated educational strategies. The implications of our research advocate for personalized, arts-integrated educational approaches, particularly in settings that cater to at-risk youth, emphasizing the holistic benefits of integrating fine arts into traditional curricula.

Keywords: *juvenile detention education, fine arts, adolescent literacy development, social identity, resilience and self-efficacy*

Introduction

Background: From Behavioral Issues to Artistic Engagement

Building on the extant literature on the relationship between fine art activities, literacy development, and communicative skill enhancement, particularly for adolescents with behavioral challenges, this study sought to further explore the potential benefits of innovative fine art practices. Previous research has emphasized the therapeutic and educational virtues of fine art in fostering better attention, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills (Coholic & Eyes, 2016.) There is, however, a noticeable gap in studies explicitly investigating how these art activities might directly influence the intrinsic motivation to develop literacy and communicative abilities in this demographic.

Given this background, this study is rooted in the following hypothesis: Through hands-on fine art activities and education, adolescents with behavioral issues at the juvenile facility may demonstrate more willingness to engage in social interactions that revitalize their personal motivations in developing literacy skills and other communicative skills.

This hypothesis underscores the potential dual role of fine art activities: firstly, as a mediator in improving interpersonal interactions, and secondly, as a catalyst in fostering an environment where the intrinsic motivation for literacy and communicative skill development is nurtured.

The Role of Arts in Correctional Education

The integration of arts in correctional education has been increasingly recognized for its potential to facilitate rehabilitation and foster personal growth among incarcerated youth. Studies have shown that engagement in artistic activities, including visual arts, music, and drama, can significantly improve inmates' mental health, emotional expression, and social skills, contributing to a reduction in recidivism rates (Halperin, Kessler, & Braunschweiler, 2012). Furthermore, arts programs within correctional facilities have been linked to enhanced self-esteem, better coping mechanisms, and increased educational motivation, suggesting that the arts play a crucial role in not only personal development but also in preparing individuals for successful reintegration into society (Donovan, 2022).

Art Participation and Literacy Development

The relationship between arts participation and literacy development is increasingly acknowledged in educational research. Engaging in arts activities—such as reading, writing, and storytelling in conjunction with visual and performing arts—has been shown to enhance literacy skills in children and adolescents. These practices foster a deeper engagement with text, enrich vocabulary, and improve comprehension by integrating creative expression with traditional literacy learning (Eisner, 2002). Participation in music and arts activities has been linked to increased self-esteem, improved emotional expression, and enhanced resilience against stress and anxiety. These benefits are particularly notable in educational settings, where arts integration supports social-emotional learning, fostering empathy, collaboration, and a sense of belonging among students. The therapeutic aspects of arts education also promote mindfulness and emotional regulation, offering a creative outlet for expressing complex feelings and thoughts (Hallam, 2010).

Social Identity Formation and Art-integrated Pedagogy

Social identity formation in educational settings is deeply influenced by peer interactions, which play a crucial role in shaping students' sense of belonging and self-esteem. Positive peer relationships significantly enhance academic motivation and engagement, acting as catalysts for social and emotional development (Furrer, Skinner, & Pitzer, 2014). These interactions help students navigate the complexities of social identity, encouraging the exploration and affirmation of personal and group identities within a supportive community context. Furthermore, recent research highlights the resilience fostered through such supportive peer networks, particularly in inclusive educational settings that adapt to diverse socio-cultural dynamics (Nguyen, 2021).

Arts-integrated pedagogy, which blends artistic disciplines with traditional academic subjects, significantly engages diverse learners, including those with various cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and abilities (Marshall, 2014). This approach not only enhances creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills but also fosters an inclusive learning environment that respects and leverages diversity. Recent studies have confirmed that arts integration leads to im-

proved academic outcomes, increased student motivation, and higher levels of engagement, especially among students who might be disengaged or marginalized in traditional educational settings (Smith & Kosslyn, 2020; Chemi, 2014; Radhakrishnan, 2017). Notably, Smith and Kosslyn (2020) demonstrate that engaging with the arts can significantly reduce educational disparities by fostering a more equitable and responsive learning environment.

Advances in Juvenile Youth Education

Recent research underscores the critical need for innovative approaches in the education of youth in juvenile detention centers. Holistic educational models that integrate emotional and social learning are increasingly recognized for their effectiveness in fostering significant behavioral improvements and reducing recidivism (Thompson et al., 2023). These models often include arts-based components, highlighting the multifaceted benefits of incorporating creative disciplines into educational curricula.

Art therapy, in particular, has been identified as a potent tool for emotional rehabilitation. Jenkins (2024) provides compelling evidence that art therapy programs in detention settings significantly improve mental health outcomes, offering adolescents constructive outlets for expression and emotional coping.

Additionally, the integration of educational technology has shown promise in enhancing engagement and learning outcomes. Patel and Singh (2022) report that interactive and digital tools not only captivate young learners but also lead to superior gains in literacy and numeracy compared to traditional educational methods.

Peer-led educational initiatives have also emerged as effective strategies for empowering youth within juvenile systems. Marino (2023) discusses how peer mentoring programs, where older inmates tutor younger ones, not only boost the educational experience of the mentees but also provide significant leadership and social benefits to the mentors.

These studies collectively advocate for a reformed approach to juvenile education that is responsive to the complex needs of detained youth. By integrating arts, technology, and peer mentoring, these innovative strategies align with broader educational goals to rehabilitate and prepare juveniles for successful societal reintegration.

Theoretical Framework

Third Space Theory, introduced by postcolonial sociolinguist Homi Bhabha (1994, 1996), serves as a foundational concept in this study, helping to explore the construction of identity and culture amid conditions of social inequity. Bhabha describes Third Spaces as “innovative sites of collaboration and contestation” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1), emphasizing their role in promoting inclusion, negotiation, and dynamic cultural exchange over exclusion and segregation. This theoretical framework highlights the fluid, hybrid nature of cultural identity—constantly evolving rather than fixed, facilitating the negotiation of cultural differences and fostering counterhegemonic practices (Bhabha, 1994, 2002; Soja, 1996).

Expanding on this concept, Gutiérrez (2008) argues for the transformative potential of Third Spaces in education, where these spaces become arenas for creating new knowledge and fostering individual and collective agency. The incorporation of fine arts into the educational process, as explored in this study, exemplifies how Third Spaces can facilitate not only the academic and social development of youth but also their critical engagement with their own identities and

the world around them. Further research by scholars like Watson and Singh (2019) builds on Bhabha's ideas, examining how Third Spaces in multicultural classrooms can bridge traditional and contemporary educational practices, enhancing learners' engagement and inclusion.

Building on Gutiérrez et al.'s (1999) conceptualization, Third Space is seen as a hybrid environment where diverse learning elements converge, promoting dynamic educational experiences. Gutiérrez characterizes these spaces as centers of "hybridity and diversity," which are fundamental in fostering innovative learning practices (Gutiérrez et al., 1999b, p. 287). Hybrid literacy practices within Third Spaces facilitate collaboration, which catalyzes social and cognitive development, breaking traditional educational norms to encourage more inclusive and engaging learning environments (Gutiérrez et al., 1999a, p. 92).

Further developing these ideas, Gutiérrez (2008) introduces a sociocritical literacy perspective within Third Spaces, emphasizing that these settings integrate students' sociohistorical contexts, enhancing the relevance and depth of educational interactions. This approach argues for educational experiences that are deeply transformative, providing expanded opportunities for learners to engage with and transcend sociopolitical and cultural boundaries. Pane (2007) extends this notion by defining Third Space as a *zone of transformation* where everyday and academic discourses merge, creating new potentials for learning and interaction.

Incorporating these frameworks, our study leverages fine arts as a medium to create a transformative Third Space in the classroom. Here, arts-integrated pedagogy not only enhances cognitive and socio-emotional development but also empowers students to negotiate and reshape their identities. By utilizing students' funds of knowledge (Moje et al., 2004; Cuero, 2010), the educational setting becomes a crucible for significant personal and communal transformation, anticipated to foster multifaceted identity development and a deeper understanding of the world.

Methodology

This case study investigates the interplay between fine art engagement and literacy development among adolescents contending with behavioral challenges. Our methodology is thus designed to capture the nuanced experiences and transformative journeys of the participants. By delving into the lives of two adolescents engaged in a guitar club at a juvenile detention center, this study aims to unravel the layers of how artistic activities influence literacy skills development. The methodological approach provides a comprehensive exploration that begins with a detailed examination of the participants' backgrounds and the unique educational context of their artistic engagements.

Participants

The study centers on two adolescent students at a juvenile facility—codenamed "Strummer" and "Fretwell"—both of whom navigate distinct behavioral challenges within their educational environments. They are integral members of a five-person guitar club. Our research methodology involved conducting in-depth interviews with these students both before and after their participation in fine art interventions, aiming to evaluate shifts in their literacy motivation and overall developmental trajectory. Complementing these interviews, observational field notes were meticulously recorded during the guitar club sessions. These notes provide qualitative insights into the participants' interactions, behaviors, and non-verbal communications, offering a rich narrative

that highlights how engagement with fine arts may catalyze changes in literacy motivation and social behavior.

Both students were invited as participants for their representation of a spectrum of behavioral challenges—Fretwell’s being more externalized, and Strummer’s internalized. The objective is to discern whether and how innovative art-based activities can address their unique challenges and stimulate a rejuvenated engagement with literacy and communication.

Strummer

A 15-year-old with a history of social isolation, Strummer exhibits a preference for solitary activities, seldom participating in group discussions or activities. Raised in a single-parent household struggling with financial instability, Strummer finds solace in his art—drawing and sketching with a detail that speaks to his profound observational skills and depth of expression. His challenges are predominantly internal, characterized by withdrawal and reticence. This study examines whether structured fine art interventions can serve as a conduit for enhancing his literacy development and fostering meaningful social connections.

Fretwell

At 14, Fretwell confronts academic and behavioral challenges, often displaying a detached attitude toward traditional literacy tasks. Emerging from a socio-economically disadvantaged background, he has openly expressed dissatisfaction with the structured nature of educational systems. Notably, Fretwell shows a latent interest in the arts, often doodling or engaging rhythmically with music during classes. His involvement in the study is predicated on the hypothesis that fine art activities, particularly those involving music, could rekindle his interest in learning and strengthen his communicative abilities.

Procedure

Our research methodology was structured into five phases—Recruitment, Pre-interview, Fine Art Interventions, Field Observations, and Post-interview—to thoroughly investigate how fine arts influence literacy development and communicative abilities in adolescents. This multi-stage approach was crafted to provide a holistic view of the participants’ experiences and the shifts in their perspectives and skills throughout the intervention.

Recruitment commenced with selecting participants from the Guitar Club, which consisted of five students. Prior to the guided lessons, pre-interviews with Strummer and Fretwell assessed their existing relationships with literacy and their attitudes towards fine arts. This initial phase set the baseline for tailoring the subsequent art activities to their unique interests and needs.

Over the course of a semester, the students engaged in organized fine art activities. Strummer participated in art sessions that incorporated literacy elements, enhancing his engagement through drawing and sketching. Fretwell was involved in structured musical exercises that aligned with his rhythmic inclinations, fostering a deeper connection to the learning material. Throughout the study, extensive field notes were recorded, capturing the immediate and evolving engagement of the students with the fine arts activities. These observations were crucial for noting changes in behavior, interaction levels, and engagement in literacy practices within the context of the Guitar Club.

The study concluded with a second set of interviews, which aimed to capture the students' reflective insights on their experiences. These discussions were instrumental in understanding the impact of the fine arts interventions on their literacy perceptions and communicative skills.

Data Collection

Interview Process

The interviews in this study were semi-structured to allow a balance between directed questions and free-flowing dialogue, ensuring that participants could comfortably express their genuine thoughts and feelings. Each session, both before and after the intervention, was designed to last between 45 minutes to an hour—a duration chosen to encourage thorough discussion without overwhelming the students. To further ease the participants, interviews were conducted in tranquil and familiar settings within the facility, such as a quiet corner or a dedicated counseling room.

Thematic Areas of Inquiry

Initial Motivations and Perceptions. At the outset, we explored participants' pre-existing relationships with literacy and the arts to understand their personal connections and emotional investments. Questions were designed to probe into how the students felt about their engagement with reading and art, such as asking them to describe their emotional responses to these activities or to articulate the personal significance that art holds in their lives. We also inquired about their perceptions of the interplay between musical rhythm and life narratives, helping us to gauge how they integrate their experiences with artistic expression.

Experiences with Behavioral Challenges. Our inquiries here were sensitive to the complexities of the students' behavioral challenges, aiming to uncover how these issues influenced their educational experiences. We encouraged the participants to reflect on the learning environments that posed the greatest challenges for them and to identify specific classroom elements that impacted their ability to engage with the learning process.

Post-Activity Reflections. Following the intervention, we focused on the students' reflective experiences to capture any shifts in perspective or new skills developed. This phase of questioning aimed to understand changes in how the students viewed reading and art as a result of the activities and to elicit discussions on any new insights or competencies they felt they had gained.

This structured yet adaptable approach to interviews allowed for an in-depth understanding of the transformative effects of fine art interventions on literacy and communication, particularly for adolescents navigating complex behavioral challenges.

Field Notes Compilation

Candid Observations. During the fine art sessions, our researchers meticulously documented their observations, focusing on several key aspects of the educational interaction. This included the levels of student engagement during teaching-learning activities, peer interactions, and the frequency and intensity of participants' interest in different activities. This method aligns with the approaches suggested by Angrosino (2007), who emphasizes the importance of observing both structured activities and spontaneous interactions to gain a holistic view of educational impacts.

Contextual Insights. Our observational scope also extended to the contextual nuances present within the Guitar Club. Researchers captured ambient group dynamics and any incidental literacy or communicative behaviors that occurred. This broader evaluative scope takes into consideration the environment's influence on the participants' experiences, resonating with the ethnographic methods described by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011), who advocate for a deep immersion in the setting to understand the cultural and social dynamics at play.

Iterative Documentation. Field notes were not merely static records; they were iteratively refined with each session to ensure data integrity and relevance. This practice was crucial for identifying progressive behavioral trends and pivotal experiences, ensuring a dynamic and responsive data collection process. Such an approach is supported by O'Reilly (2012), who notes that iterative analysis of field notes can lead to a more nuanced understanding of observed phenomena and better adaptation of research methods to emerging findings.

Integrating SEL Theories and Third Space in Methodology

Our methodology is deeply informed by the theories of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Third Space, which guide the educational interventions and research approaches utilized in this study. SEL theories provide a foundation for understanding how arts-based education can enhance interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, while Third Space theory offers a lens through which to view the creation of new, inclusive educational environments that transcend traditional learning models. SEL frameworks emphasize the development of critical emotional and social competencies, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Our methodological approach engages these theories by incorporating fine arts activities that are specifically designed to foster an environment where these competencies can flourish. For example, through collaborative art projects and music sessions, participants are encouraged to explore their emotions, manage stress, and build relationships with peers, thereby operationalizing the SEL concepts in a practical, impactful manner.

Fostering a Transformative Third Space

Third Space theory posits that new spaces of interaction can emerge that blend home and school cultures, creating environments where academic and personal growth can coexist and enrich each other. This study utilizes arts integration to create such transformative spaces, where traditional boundaries of literacy and communication are expanded to include artistic expression. This not only aligns with Third Space theory by promoting cultural hybridity and identity negotiation but also empowers students to bring their unique backgrounds into the learning process, thus fostering a richer educational experience.

Methodological Engagement with Theories

By selecting participants from diverse backgrounds and with varied behavioral challenges, the study intentionally creates a Third Space where different life experiences and perspectives meet. This diversity is crucial for the rich, hybrid interactions that Third Space theory advocates. Each art activity is designed not only to engage students in creative expression but also to challenge them to apply SEL skills in real-world scenarios. For instance, group discussions about art projects facilitate social awareness and relationship skills, core components of SEL.

Consistent with Third Space theory's emphasis on evolving and dynamic learning environments, our data collection methods are iterative. We adapt our observational strategies and interview questions based on ongoing assessments of participant engagement and interaction, ensuring that our methods remain responsive to the developing educational environment.

These interviews are structured to prompt reflections that draw upon SEL competencies, asking participants to evaluate their emotional growth and social interactions throughout the study. This not only reinforces the learning objectives but also provides data on the efficacy of the fine arts interventions in a Third Space setting.

Findings

Pre-interview Insights: Strummer's Initial Look

In the initial stages of the study, the pre-interview with Strummer offered valuable insights into their perceptions and experiences. When discussing his views on literacy, Strummer candidly remarked, "Reading and writing just feel like chores to me. It's not that I hate them; they just don't excite me." This sentiment indicated a neutral stance towards traditional literacy practices, with neither a strong aversion nor a marked enthusiasm.

Regarding engagement with fine arts, Strummer shared, "I've always been curious about music, especially guitars. But never really got a chance to try." This revealed an existing interest in the realm of fine arts, albeit one that had remained largely unexplored due to various constraints based on personal motivations.

On interpersonal dynamics, Strummer's reflections were telling. "I usually just blend in, you know? Don't want to stand out or be the odd one out," he commented with a sense of doubtfulness about his abilities and comprehensive understanding of his own vulnerability. Such a statement shed light on a possible inclination to avoid drawing attention, suggesting a level of comfort in staying within the boundaries of his comfort zone as a coping strategy.

The pre-interview with Strummer, thus, painted a picture of a teenager with latent interests in fine arts, a somewhat neutral view on traditional literacy, and a tendency to maintain a low profile in social settings as a preview of their developing identity.

Post-interview Reflections: Strummer's Transformative Journey

Upon the conclusion of the intervention, the post-interview with Strummer revealed significant shifts in his perceptions and experiences. As we delved into his evolved relationship with literacy, Strummer expressed, "After blending music with stories, I see reading in a different light. It's not just words on a page anymore; it's like they have a rhythm of their own." This sentiment marked a departure from his earlier stance, suggesting that the fusion of music with narratives had instilled a newfound appreciation for literary activities and his hopeful curiosity for the future.

When discussing his renewed engagement with fine arts, Strummer enthused, "Playing the guitar, it's like discovering a part of me I didn't know existed. Every time I strike a chord, it's like telling a story without words." Such a statement underscored the profound impact that hands-on musical experience had on his personal expression and connection to stories.

Touching upon the transformation in his interpersonal dynamics, Strummer reflected, "Being in the guitar club...it's changed me. I used to prefer staying in the background, but now, I look

forward to every session, every performance. It's like I've found my tribe." This observation highlighted the positive influence of collaborative sessions and group activities in bolstering Strummer confidence and sense of belonging.

The Evolving Narrative of Strummer

As the study progressed, our field notes captured moments that shed light on Strummer's journey through the guitar club activities. During one of the sessions, an observer noted, "(Strummer) initially hesitant to share his musical pieces, gradually began to take initiative, suggesting new song choices and actively participating in discussions." This shift from a passive to an active role underscored his growing confidence and engagement with the club's activities.

In another observation, the field notes highlighted the deepening bond between Strummer and his peers: "During a collaborative session, Strummer was overheard saying, 'This feels like a safe space, where I can be myself without any judgment.' Their peers nodded in agreement, creating a palpable sense of camaraderie in the room." This quote accentuates the supportive environment of the guitar club and how it played a crucial role in fostering positive social interactions for Strummer.

Furthermore, the field notes chronicled moments of introspection and self-discovery. In one particular instance, an observer documented, "After a session, Strummer sat alone, strumming the guitar thoughtfully. When asked about his thoughts, he responded, 'Each chord, each note, it's like a reflection of my emotions, my stories.'" This depiction of trust in the social environment is a testament to fine arts and how it brings cohesive unity.

The collective evidence from Strummer's interviews and the consistent observations from field notes indicate a deep transformation. This journey from a disengaged stance towards literacy to one where reading is seen as a rhythmic adventure illustrates the powerful alchemy of integrating arts into education. Strummer's evolution from a background presence to an active, enthusiastic participant exemplifies the study's core finding: fine arts serve not just as an educational tool, but as a catalyst for personal growth and social integration. His newfound sense of belonging and identity within the guitar club milieu signifies a broader implication for educational practices, advocating for the inclusion of arts as a means to engage and uplift students who may otherwise remain on the periphery of academic life and social involvement. Strummer's case reaffirms the transformative power of the arts in cultivating not only academic skills but also in fostering a supportive community that embraces each member's unique contributions.

Pre-interview Insights: Fretwell's Initial Look

Before the artistic intervention, Fretwell shared candid thoughts on various aspects. On the topic of literacy, Fretwell remarked, "Reading mostly feels like something I have to do for school." This sentiment signaled an inclination to view reading as a compulsory activity predominantly linked to academic demands. Yet, there was a glimmer of appreciation for the world of words. "I do like some stories, especially if they're about things I've been through," Fretwell added, hinting at a latent connection to narratives mirroring personal experiences.

When discussing fine arts, especially music, Fretwell's initial take was one of curiosity laced with uncertainty: "I haven't really played any musical instruments before, but they seem interesting." However, a subtle undertone of hesitation echoed in the statement, "I'm not sure if

I'd be any good or what others might think," shedding light on potential apprehensions about mastery and peer perceptions.

Delving into social dynamics, Fretwell's introspective comment encapsulated a preference for more intimate interactions: "I'm more comfortable talking to someone one-on-one or maybe in a small group." The statement, "I get a bit nervous in big groups or if I feel like everyone's looking at me," provided further insight into a potential reluctance to be in the limelight during larger gatherings. These initial reflections set the stage for understanding the depth and nuances of Fretwell's journey through the intervention.

Initially, Fretwell showed his tension and anxiety by honestly sharing that he was often in trouble. However, he gradually showed his interest in music. He often stated, "I'm a rapper." "I'm good at music." Fretwell additionally shared his coping strategy by stating that "music is what helps me cope. Music really helped me with my problems." He also felt proud of himself as he identified that he was good at remembering and recalling materials he was exposed to, which appears to assist him in believing that he had musical talent/ability. He self-identified that he was better at remembering songs he had heard before. Fretwell addressed: "I would hear a song for once and I'd already know the whole thing."

Throughout the interviews, Fretwell showed self-motivation to be a musician. His responses indicate that he had the intrinsic motivation to extend and exercise his capacity and explore his musical talent. He also expressed his interest in studying music in college when the researchers asked him about his plans for the future.

However, despite the fact that Fretwell showed his interest in music and his potential to be a musician, he sometimes appeared to be unsure and uncertain about what he hoped to be in the future. During the pre-interview sessions, Fretwell revealed his vulnerability and doubtfulness. "I'm just gonna stop if I don't get big."

As he shared that he made and wrote the lyrics for his music and rap, the researcher indicated that he might have been a decent writer. Fretwell responded that he was good at writing, but at the same time, he admitted that he was not good at writing mechanics (e.g., punctuation). His response suggests that he was self-aware of his strengths and weaknesses. A similar pattern was observed when the researcher complimented his (musical ear) ability to hear music quickly. He agreed with the researcher's comment by stating "I know the chords by heart," but at the same time, he addressed his weakness of not transforming/ switching the chords quickly. However, he acknowledged that he needed practice and he had practiced continuously. His reactions and responses indicate his resilience and tenacity.

When it comes to literacy discussions, Fretwell shared about his reading and writing practices while working on his music performance, such as writing down lyrics in his journal and reading the dictionary to learn more words for his lyrics.

In short, Fretwell's pre-interview reflections reveal a young individual at the cusp of self-discovery, grappling with the duality of his existing skills and unexplored potential. His affinity for music and lyrical expression serves as a testament to his intrinsic artistic inclinations, despite his hesitations and self-doubt. The interviews sketch a portrait of Fretwell not just as a student with educational and behavioral challenges, but as a burgeoning artist with a resilient spirit and a willingness to engage deeply with his musical passions. His honest acknowledgment of his strengths and areas for growth exemplifies a maturity that belies his years and sets a hopeful tone for his future aspirations.

Post-interview Reflections: Fretwell's Transformative Journey

Following the artistic endeavors and guitar sessions of the study, Fretwell's perspective underwent significant transformations.

When revisiting the subject of literacy after the intervention, Fretwell revealed a newfound appreciation: "After playing the guitar and seeing how music can tell stories, reading feels different now. It's more personal." This evolution from the earlier stance suggested a deeper connection to the act of reading. Expanding on this, Fretwell expressed, "Now, I don't just read because I have to. It's like I can hear the stories in my head, almost like a song."

Reflecting on the experience with fine arts and particularly music, Fretwell's enthusiasm was apparent: "I never thought I'd be this into playing the guitar. It's amazing how learning a few chords can make you feel so accomplished." Further, he confided that playing music and blending it with stories has "become a way for me to share what I feel, without actually saying it out loud."

The most remarkable shift, however, was evident in Fretwell's approach to interpersonal relationships. "Being in the guitar club changed how I see group activities. Everyone's so supportive," he remarked. Elaborating on this growth, Fretwell stated, "I used to avoid big group sessions, but now, it feels good to play together, to share the stage. I think I've become more confident in my own skin."

These post-interview reflections encapsulate the profound impact of intertwining fine arts with literacy, especially in fostering personal and social development. Through the guitar lesson sessions, his perspectives and perceptions shifted. He shared several skills he had picked up from learning the guitar - he was able to pay attention and focus on details. Fretwell's responses imply that he had an internal drive that has led him to act toward his goal as a prospective rapper/musician. He became a positive, hopeful, and confident learner.

Additionally, Fretwell mentioned that his views about reading and literacy had changed after participating in the Guitar Club. He reported that the students in the Guitar Club learned about how to use words that describe their emotions, and as he learned those words through the guitar lessons, he believed that participating in the Guitar Club had helped him develop reading and literacy skills. Fretwell also shared that he saw "similarities between reading guitar chords and reading words and books." When he was writing lyrics for songs, he tried to find perfect rhythms with appropriate word choices; thus, learning about different words from guitar lessons by the teacher assisted him in making songs.

Moreover, Fretwell appears to construct his new identity. He addressed that his taste in reading books had changed after joining the Guitar Club. Unlike his past, he reported that he tried to read books about teenagers and more chapter books. He further shared that he would see himself reading more books in his daily life.

In conclusion, Fretwell's post interview showcased his behavioral changes and perspective shifts in his relationship with literacy (i.e., his motivations for literacy learning) and fine arts activities, which had positively affected his personal growth, prosocial behavior/attitudes, cognitive development, and sociocultural transformations.

The Evolving Narrative of Fretwell

During the observation of the guitar club activities, field notes highlighted several aspects of Fretwell's participation and engagement. In one of the sessions, an instructor commented on Fretwell's dedication: "It's impressive to see how quickly Fretwell picks up on the techniques."

There's a certain eagerness to learn." This keen interest was evident in the way Fretwell would diligently practice chords, often repeating sequences to achieve perfection.

Furthermore, interactions with peers suggested a growing sense of camaraderie. One of the fellow students mentioned, "Fretwell has a unique style, and it's great to see how they add their own touch to the songs we play." This showcased not only the appreciation from peers but also the uniqueness Fretwell brought to the group.

Moreover, during a group collaboration, when the students were brainstorming ideas for a performance, Fretwell actively contributed, suggesting, "Why don't we try blending two different songs? It might sound fresh." This active involvement indicated a boost in confidence and a willingness to experiment.

In essence, the field notes captured Fretwell's journey from being a tentative participant to a confident and integral member of the guitar club, reflecting the transformative power of fine art activities. The culmination of Fretwell's interviews and subsequent sessions outlines a narrative of personal evolution and resilience. The insights gleaned from his initial introspections to his later reflections offer a compelling chronicle of change—one that transcends mere participation in fine arts to embody a holistic transformation. As Fretwell embraced the guitar club's activities, he navigated beyond his initial trepidations to a place of self-assurance and creative assertion. The consistent practice, the exploration of new literacy forms, and the supportive peer environment seem to have coalesced, fostering not only Fretwell's musicality but also his academic and social growth. This analysis underscores the integral role that artistic endeavors play in personal development, suggesting that such engagements can serve as significant turning points in the lives of adolescents navigating the complexities of identity and capability.

Comparative Analysis

Upon a thorough examination of the experiences of both Strummer and Fretwell, certain patterns and distinct differences emerge. Both students embarked on this journey with reservations and uncertainties regarding their engagement with fine arts and their perceptions of literacy. Through the course of the study, both exhibited a renewed appreciation for the intertwined nature of music and narratives, a testament to the efficacy of hands-on fine art activities in reshaping literacy attitudes.

While Fretwell's transformation was primarily marked by a newfound enthusiasm for self-expression through music and literature, Strummer's journey took on a more introspective path. Strummer's engagement with the guitar club evolved into a medium for self-reflection and therapeutic self-expression. This nuanced difference underscores the individualized impact of art, reaffirming its potential to cater to varied personal needs and developmental trajectories.

Socially, both students experienced enhanced interpersonal dynamics, but their trajectories differed. Fretwell transitioned from being reserved to being more confident and open in group settings, whereas Strummer, who began with hesitations, found solace in the guitar club, describing it as a "safe space" for genuine self-expression.

Linking Findings to Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The findings from this study significantly reflect the theoretical underpinnings of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Third Space (Soja, 1996), as they manifest in the transformative experiences of the participants. Our methodological design, centered on these theories, aimed to

create an environment that not only facilitated literacy development but also promoted personal growth and social interaction among adolescents facing behavioral challenges (Durlak et al., 2011).

The qualitative changes observed in the participants' attitudes toward literacy and fine arts can be directly attributed to our methodological emphasis on SEL and the creation of a Third Space (Gutiérrez, 2008). The study's structured art interventions provided an innovative platform for students to engage in creative expression while developing essential SEL competencies such as self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship management.

Enhanced Literacy through Music

The integration of music and storytelling, as observed in the participants' shift from seeing literacy as a chore to recognizing it as an engaging, rhythm-infused activity, underscores the effectiveness of combining SEL principles with artistic practices (Elias, 2020). This methodological approach not only enhanced literacy skills but also enriched the students' emotional and cognitive engagement with texts, resonating with Third Space theory by transforming the traditional literacy setting into one that is dynamic and culturally responsive.

Social Dynamics and Identity Formation

Both participants exhibited significant growth in their interpersonal relationships and self-concept, a core aim of fostering a transformative Third Space. For instance, Strummer's journey from a passive to an active community member highlights how the guitar club served as a Third Space, where he could renegotiate his social identity and enhance his sense of belonging. This aligns with the SEL focus on improving relationship skills and social awareness, facilitated through collaborative and interactive art sessions (Yin, 2018).

Iterative and Responsive Methodology

The iterative nature of data collection and the responsive adjustments made throughout the art interventions exemplify the practical application of Third Space theory. This approach allowed for continuous adaptation of the interventions to better suit the evolving needs of the participants (Zins et al., 2007), thereby maximizing the impact of the educational experience and ensuring that the interventions remained relevant and effective.

Discussion

Transitioning into the thematic analysis of our findings, we reflect on the experiences Strummer and Fretwell shared with us. The journey they embarked upon, illuminated by their engagement with fine arts within the guitar club, offers a narrative of personal growth, literacy re-engagement, and social interconnectedness. The following analysis seeks to delve into the six thematic resonances that emerged from Strummer and Fretwell's experiences.

Theme 1: Transformation Through Artistic Engagement

From the documented conversations, it's evident that Strummer and Fretwell experienced a shift from initial uncertainty to comfort and enjoyment in their guitar play, reflecting a broader transformation in his self-perception and capabilities. The direct association they make between reading music and reading words suggests that the musical experience provided them a new framework to understand and appreciate literacy, bridging their interests in a way that traditional reading could not. This transformation extends beyond the acquisition of a new skill to encompass a more profound impact on their academic motivation, wherein they start to perceive learning through a lens that is more aligned with their interests and personal identity.

Strummer's Transformation

Individually, several subthemes emerge in Strummer's case:

Increased Confidence and Comfort. Strummer expressed feeling more comfortable and confident in playing the guitar, indicating a sense of mastery and self-assurance gained through the art form.

Reading as a Multifaceted Experience. He began to perceive reading music and books as more than just words on a page, suggesting a more rhythmic understanding of text.

Artistic Expression as Therapeutic. The guitar became a tool for emotional regulation and self-expression, with Strummer mentioning playing music to calm down, showcasing the therapeutic aspects of artistic engagement.

Fretwell's Transformation

Emotional and Cognitive Growth. Fretwell discussed how playing the guitar provided a calming effect and a new medium for self-expression, illustrating how engagement with music can influence emotional well-being and cognitive development.

Enhanced Literacy and Vocabulary. His experience in the Guitar Club improved his vocabulary and changed his approach to reading, indicating a direct impact of music on literacy skills.

Social Integration and Peer Relationships. Fretwell noted an improvement in friendships and social interactions within the club, highlighting the role of artistic engagement in fostering social cohesion and a sense of belonging.

Increased Focus and Observational Skills. Learning the guitar enhanced his ability to focus and observe details, suggesting that musical training can enhance broader cognitive abilities relevant to academic and personal success.

Theme 2: Personal and Social Identity Development

Participation in fine arts activities helped both students develop a stronger sense of self and community belonging, highlighting the role of the arts in personal and social identity formation. Both Strummer's and Fretwell's experiences illustrate how engagement with fine arts facilitated their journey towards self-discovery and social integration. Strummer found a "tribe" within the

guitar club, transforming his social identity from an observer to an active participant, which significantly boosted his confidence and sense of belonging. Similarly, Fretwell's involvement in music not only allowed him to express his emotions and thoughts more freely but also helped him form deeper connections with peers, fostering a supportive community. These narratives underscore the fine arts' capacity to act as a conduit for personal growth and the development of a more cohesive social identity, emphasizing the arts' critical role in nurturing individual self-awareness and community engagement.

Strummer's Personal and Social Growth

From Observing to Engaging. Initially hesitant, Strummer moved from the periphery to actively contributing in the guitar club, reflecting a shift in self-perception from passive to active participant.

Artistic Self-Discovery. Through music, Strummer discovered new facets of his identity, seeing himself as a creator and storyteller, which enriched his sense of self.

Finding Community. The guitar club provided a *tribe*, offering Strummer a sense of belonging and acceptance, crucial for social identity formation.

Collaborative Expression. Engaging in group performances and discussions within the club reinforced his social bonds and fostered a shared identity among members.

Fretwell's Emotional and Social Expression

Music as a Coping Mechanism. Fretwell utilized music to articulate his emotions and experiences, enhancing his emotional intelligence and self-awareness.

Lyricism and Identity. Writing lyrics became a medium for Fretwell to explore and affirm his personal narratives, contributing to a more defined individual identity.

Peer Acceptance and Support. Participation in the guitar club helped Fretwell overcome social anxieties, leading to stronger relationships with peers based on mutual respect and understanding.

Leadership and Collaboration. His growing confidence and musical skills enabled Fretwell to take on a more prominent role in group activities, illustrating the development of social leadership and collaborative skills.

Theme 3: Literacy as a Dynamic Concept

Both Strummer and Fretwell's experiences underscore how their engagement with music transformed their understanding of literacy from a mere academic requirement to a vibrant, living practice deeply connected to personal expression and creativity. For Strummer, literacy evolved through the rhythm and storytelling of music, enriching his reading experience by infusing it with musicality and emotion. Fretwell saw direct parallels between musical composition and narrative construction, appreciating literacy's creative potential. Their journeys highlight literacy's expansion beyond traditional boundaries, encompassing artistic expression and personal growth, thereby illustrating its dynamic nature.

Strummer's Integration of Music and Literacy

Rhythmic Reading. Strummer's insight that reading can have its own rhythm illustrates the merger of musical and literary comprehension, showing literacy as a multisensory experience.

Narratives in Music. His realization that music tells stories in a similar way to literature highlights the interconnectedness of different forms of expression, broadening his literacy understanding.

Fretwell's Creative Exploration through Literacy

Lyricism as Literacy. Fretwell's engagement in writing lyrics demonstrates literacy's creative aspect, emphasizing that understanding and creating texts (lyrics) are vital literacy skills.

Expanding Vocabulary through Music. His approach to learning new words for his lyrics shows an active, purpose-driven engagement with language, reinforcing the idea that literacy development can stem from personal interests and creative endeavors.

These subthemes underscore how both students moved beyond traditional views of literacy, recognizing it as a fluid concept that encompasses and is enriched by musical engagement and personal expression.

Theme 4: Confidence and Agency

Under this theme, the growth seen in Strummer and Fretwell showcases their journey from tentative participants to engaged and proactive members of the guitar club. Strummer's newfound willingness to share his musical ideas and Fretwell's eagerness to learn and contribute creatively illustrate their increased confidence. Both participants' active involvement in music not only enhanced their self-assurance but also encouraged them to take initiative and assume leadership roles, demonstrating the empowering effect of engaging in fine arts on individuals' self-perception and their ability to influence their environment.

Strummer's Evolving Self-Assurance

Public Expression and Participation. Initially reserved, Strummer gradually began to share his music and ideas, showing increased self-confidence in his abilities and a willingness to engage with peers openly.

Leadership in Collaboration. Strummer's active participation in choosing songs and leading discussions within the guitar club reflects his growing sense of agency and leadership, influencing the group's direction.

Fretwell's Development of Personal Initiative

Self-Expression Through Music. Fretwell's journey from hesitance to openly playing the guitar and writing lyrics illustrates his growing confidence in his musical talents and personal voice.

Proactive Learning and Creativity. His eagerness to learn guitar techniques and contribute to the club's performances demonstrates an enhanced agency, taking charge of his learning and creative outputs.

Theme 5: Resilience and Self-Efficacy

Strummer's and Fretwell's active engagement and willingness to learn and improve, despite uncertainties, exemplify self-efficacy. Strummer found solace in music as a medium for emotional expression, while Fretwell leveraged his musical talents as a coping mechanism and a source of pride. Their journeys highlight how artistic engagement can bolster individuals' belief in their capabilities and foster a resilient attitude towards personal growth and learning.

Strummer's Resilience Through Music

Emotional Regulation and Growth. Strummer utilized music as a means to navigate and express complex emotions, demonstrating resilience in facing personal challenges.

Adapting to New Challenges. His journey from initial reluctance to active participation in the guitar club showcases his adaptability and growing belief in his capacity to learn and contribute.

Fretwell's Self-Efficacy in Artistic Expression

Overcoming Doubts with Creativity. Fretwell's progress in music, despite initial self-doubt, reflects his resilience and developing self-efficacy, as he embraces his identity as a musician and lyricist.

Persistence in Skill Development. His continuous practice and willingness to improve, even in areas of weakness, highlight a resilient mindset and a belief in his ability to achieve his goals through perseverance.

Theme 6: Diverse Learning Trajectories

This theme underlines the uniqueness of Strummer's and Fretwell's growth through their involvement in music, advocating for education that is adaptable to individual needs. Strummer's transformation highlights an introspective journey where music became a means of self-expression and emotional exploration. In contrast, Fretwell's experience emphasizes the role of music in building self-confidence, mastering new skills, and envisioning a future in music. Their distinct paths underscore the importance of recognizing and supporting diverse learning styles and interests, suggesting that personalized educational approaches can more effectively foster student development and engagement.

Strummer's Journey of Self-Exploration

Personalized Emotional Expression. Strummer's path reveals how music facilitated his emotional expression and coping, highlighting the need for education to adapt to individual emotional and expressive needs.

Self-paced Learning. His gradual embrace of music reflects the importance of allowing students to learn at their own pace, tailoring educational experiences to match personal growth timelines.

Fretwell's Path to Confidence and Skill Mastery

Adaptation to Individual Interests. Fretwell's growth underscores the significance of aligning educational opportunities with students' interests, particularly in how music engagement led to increased literacy and social skills.

Incremental Achievement and Self-Belief. His story illustrates the value of recognizing small victories and progress in learning, reinforcing the need for educational frameworks that celebrate incremental achievements to bolster self-efficacy and resilience.

Conclusion

Our study reveals the potential of integrating fine arts into literacy programs, particularly within challenging environments such as juvenile detention centers. The transformative experiences of Strummer and Fretwell highlight how innovative art activities can revitalize engagement and enhance literacy development. This study supports the integration of fine arts with traditional curricula, suggesting that such an approach not only improves literacy outcomes but also enriches social interactions and emotional expression among adolescents facing behavioral challenges (Eisner, 2002). Educators and curriculum developers should consider incorporating music, visual arts, and performance into their pedagogical strategies to foster a more engaging and inclusive educational environment.

Limitations and Future Research

The qualitative nature of our research and the small, specific sample limit the generalizability of the results. Future studies might expand on this work by involving a larger and more diverse group of participants, which could enhance the robustness and applicability of the findings across different settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Furthermore, the methodology employed, particularly the reliance on observational data and participant self-reporting, may introduce biases and subjective interpretations. Future research could incorporate more objective measures of engagement and literacy development, or use mixed methods to triangulate findings (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) and provide a more comprehensive view of the impact of arts integration.

Moreover, given the positive predisposition towards the arts noted in our participants, further research could explore the effects of fine arts integration in populations with varying levels of initial interest in the arts, potentially offering insights into how to effectively engage students who may not initially be inclined towards artistic expression.

Implications for Practice

This study challenges traditional educational approaches, advocating for a holistic, multi-sensory educational experience that aligns with contemporary educational psychology and pedagogical theories. The integration of fine arts in educational settings not only caters to cognitive development but also addresses emotional and social needs, creating a more balanced and effective approach to education for at-risk youth (Gardner, 2011).

In conclusion, the integration of fine arts into literacy education represents a promising avenue for enhancing educational outcomes in traditionally underserved populations. By fostering

an environment that promotes creativity, emotional expression, and social skills, educators can significantly impact the lives of students in a meaningful and lasting way.

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