

Creative Arts Therapy in Afterschool Spaces: A Bridge for Diverse Learners

Jasmine Ebron



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**ACTIVATING THE POWER
OF AFTERSCHOOL**



PASE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Today's Focus

Using arts as a flexible bridge, not a rigid plan

1. What's the Gap?
2. Creative Arts Therapy
3. Adaptation Framework
4. Case Examples from CAA
5. Hands-On Activity
6. Reflection & Program Adaptation
7. Wrap-Up & Resources



Center for All Abilities

We envision a world where those of all abilities can integrate fully in society.

CAA was founded to address a gap in the special needs community, particularly among Chinese immigrant families. We act as a supportive resource for these families to turn to in times of need, offering programming for neurodiverse children, learning resources for parents, and a supportive atmosphere for the entire family.



Jasmine Ebron, LCAT-LP

Using arts as a flexible bridge, not a rigid plan

- Art Therapist and Associate Executive Director at CAA
- 7 years of experience in NYC school and afterschool environments as a teaching artist and art therapist
- Supports neurodiverse youth and immigrant families through individual and group creative arts therapy programming
- Specializes in the use of photography to support self expression and identity development



What's the Data?

- Neurodivergence can include but are not limited to:
 - Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
 - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
 - Dyslexia / Dysgraphia / Dyscalculia
 - Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- About 2% of NYC children aged 2–12 — approximately 22,000 kids — have been diagnosed with ASD
- About 19–21% of NYC public school students have an Individualized Education Program (IEP)—over 200,000 students in total
- Roughly 1 in 5 students in NYC public schools has a recognized disability.
- Increased diagnosis of autism in immigrant and communities of color – 1 in 36 eight-year-olds in 2020, up from 1 in 44 in 2018

What's the Gap?

- Neurodivergence may be under-identified in immigrant populations due to stigma, lack of trust, or systemic barriers to diagnosis.
- Students with autism, ELLs, and Black/Latino students are disproportionately placed in more restrictive settings (e.g., self-contained classes) compared to their white or non-disabled peers
- Most general afterschool programs don't have staff trained in behavior support, sensory regulation, or trauma-informed care
- The majority of inclusive after school programs are geared toward elementary-aged children.
- Neurodivergent teens face fewer social/recreational opportunities, just when peer connection becomes most critical for development and mental health.

Creative Arts Therapy 101

Music | Art | Drama | Dance & Movement

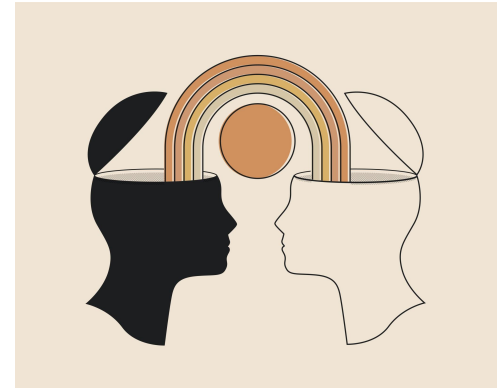
- Art, music, and movement as clinical tools
- Focus on expression, regulation, and communication
- Builds SEL and peer connection
- Supports regulation and self-expression
- Encourages inclusion and confidence in diverse learners



Creative Arts as a Bridge

Inclusive, low-pressure, and culturally responsive

- allow students to communicate, process, and connect in ways that transcend language and developmental level
- Creative arts activities provide insight into:
 - Communication preferences (verbal, visual, musical)
 - Peer interaction and collaboration skills
 - Sensory preferences and motor coordination
 - Flexibility, attention, and ability to follow directions



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Adaptation Framework

Visual Supports | Modeling | Language Access

Flexible Participation | Sensory Sensitivity | Relationship Building

- Who is the activity for?
- What are their needs/interests?
- What's the goal (connection, expression, regulation)?
- How can you adjust the format/support?



Case Example 1

Multi-Modality Creative Arts with a Social Skills Group

- Increase confident
- Relationship building
- Practice using their voice
- Practicing self expression
- Energy regulation
- Emotional expression



Case Example 2

Creative Arts Therapy in Afterschool

- Positive peer relationships
- Collaboration and communication
- Boundary setting
- Energy regulation
- Building confidence

CAA also provide staff training designed to meet the needs of the students and educators in the program



Safe Place Directive

Draw a safe or special place – real or imaginary

- Draw your “place” using whatever drawing materials are available
- Consider your **five senses**:
 - What do you see?
 - What do you hear?
 - What do you smell?
 - What can you touch?
 - What can you taste?



**THIS
IS MY SAFE
PLACE**

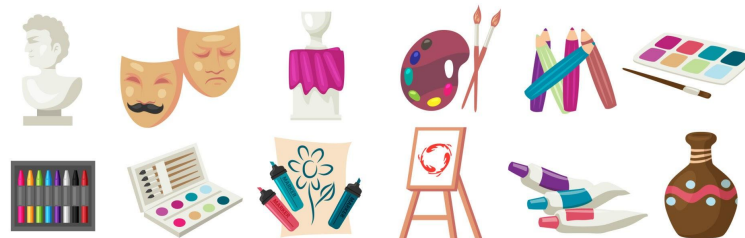
Safe Place Directive - Adaptation

Adaptation ≠ a whole new activity

- **Modify your drawing as if you were adapting the activity for your students**
- Consider how your students may interpret this activity? How do the instructions need to be altered? What materials would you provide?
 - Add labels or simplify the drawing
 - Use only symbols, colors, or lines
 - Add visual steps or a storyline
 - Remove or change parts of their drawing to reflect a different process

Group Share

- What adaptations did you make?
- How might this change the student's experience?
- Where does creative arts show up in your programs?
- When have you seen creative arts benefit a diverse learner?
- What challenges do you face providing directives or adaptation?



Resources

[Extreme Kids and Crew](#) - Inclusive arts/play programs

[IncludeNYC](#) - family and educator friendly resources

[Sesame Street in Communities](#) - Free, multilingual SEL + inclusion activities

[Social-Emotional Arts Toolkit](#) - Creative group activities (music, art, story, movement)

[Community Word Project](#) - collaborative arts in the classroom

[BKLYN Library](#) – Inclusive Services - adaptive art, music, and sensory programming

[Arts for All](#) - accessible arts workshops in schools

[Expressive Creative Arts Therapy Summit](#) - creative arts in therapy, education, and community settings

[Sesame Street in Communities](#) - Downloadable, multilingual tools

[Arts Connection](#) - arts integration PD for educators

Thank you!!!

Creativity is a bridge to belonging

Jasmine@allabilities.org | www.allabilities.org

CAA partners with schools and afterschool programs to provide creative arts therapy residencies that include assessments, individual sessions, and group work.

We also offer customized staff trainings for professionals working with neurodiverse youth—tailored to the unique needs of your students and setting.

