

# Use of Expressive Arts Therapy in Helping Children with ASD to Develop Social Emotional Competence

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## Introduction

This is the era of inclusive education. There are many potential benefits of inclusive education. Students could have a better academic achievement, quality of peers relationship; on the other hands, mainstream students could learn more about empathy and acceptance<sup>1</sup>. However, with limited resources, students with ASD often experience difficulties in mainstream schools, such as academic failure, peers rejections, etc. Most of their difficulties are due to the deficits on the social and emotional development<sup>2,3,4</sup>. However, the society including parents, educators and schools often overlooks the importance of social and emotional learning (SEL).

SEL identifies five-competence areas of skill acquisition, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making<sup>4</sup>. Expressive arts therapy approach provides a built-in sense of interest, fun, and interaction that students could enjoy participating in the activity while learning the social emotional skills.

Therefore, through the fun and relaxing expressive arts therapy approach combined with cognitive-behavioral therapy and applied behavior analysis, students are more motivated to learn the essential social and emotional skills that is vital for the success in inclusive mainstream schools.

## Methods and Materials

Through the in-depth investigation of the progress of an eight year-old primary student who diagnosed with ASD, participated a 20 sessions of expressive arts social emotional learning program targeting 3 out of 5 core areas of the social emotional learning program including self-awareness, social-awareness and self-management (see Table 1). The pre- and post-rating score of the Social Emotion Learning Rubric rated by the teachers and parents as well as their comments, were used as quantitative and qualitative data respectively to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

## Expressive Arts Social Emotional Learning Program

Social Emotional Learning	Sub-goals	Themes	Art Modalities
Introduction	Establish Trustful relationship		Visual Arts
Self-awareness	Strengths and Weaknesses	My strengths and Interests	Visual Arts Music
		Adventure Exploration	Visual Arts Music
	Emotion Awareness	Emotion Wheel	Visual Arts
		Emotion Exploration and Expression	Music Movement
Sense of Responsibility	Role and Responsibility	Visual Arts	
	Exploration on Different Roles	Drama	
Social-awareness	Nonverbal Social Cues	Mirror Mirror	Movement
		Guess the Feeling	Drama Movement
		Situations Exploration	Drama
	Cognitive Flexibility	Physical Flexibility	Movement
		Rock Thinker vs Flexible Thinker	Drama Visual Arts
		Stories of Perspective Taking	Drama Visual Arts
Real Life Situation Exploration	Drama		
Self-management	Self-regulation	Creative Movement and Breathing Fun	Movement
		Imagination and Visualization	Music Visual Arts
		Anger and Calm	Drama Visual Arts

Table 1. Expressive Arts Social Emotional Learning Program

## Objectives

The purpose of this in-depth case study is to examine the effectiveness of incorporating the well-known cognitive-behavioral therapy and applied behavior analysis with expressive arts therapy under the social emotion learning framework in helping students with ASD to develop social emotional competence.

## Results

Based on the findings of this study, the participant has improvements in all three core areas of social emotional learning including self-awareness, social-awareness and self-management (see chart 1 for the total score in each area of the social emotional learning rubric).

Below are the comments from parents and teachers:

1) Self-awareness: the participant is more aware of his strengths and interests as well as his emotion states. Also he is more happier and more easier to share his feelings to others. Furthermore, he is more aware of his role as a student so that he seldom complains about homework.

2) Social-awareness: the participant shows that he is more aware of the non-verbal social cues of others; therefore, when he picks up the cues, he is able to respond in a socially appropriate way. However, he is still in the process of learning so teachers have to remind him about social cues from time to time. Furthermore, he is more flexible than before so that he is now more willing to accept alternative perspectives.

3) Self-management: the participant has learned different self-regulation techniques. This definitely help him to control his emotion and behavior.

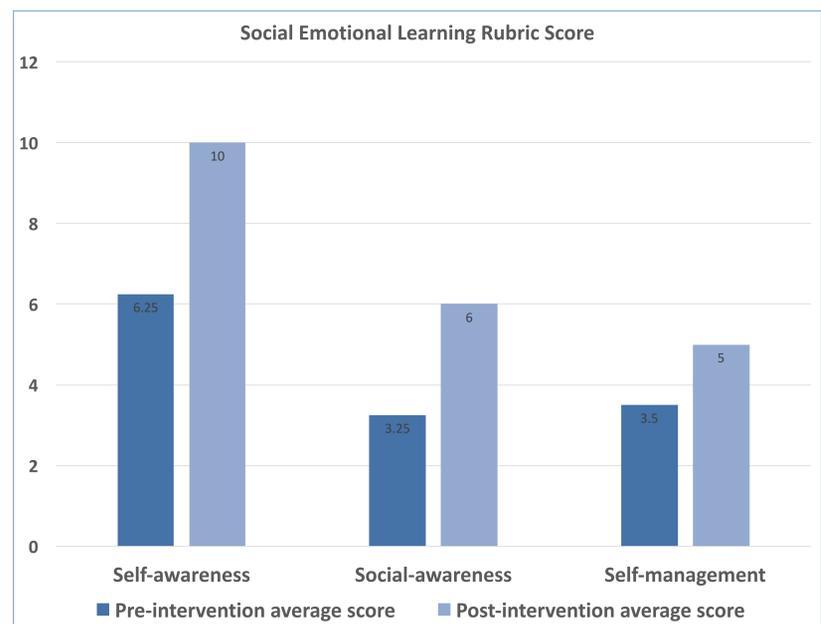


Chart 1. Social Emotional Learning Rubric Score

## Conclusions

There are many SEN students who are struggling with academic, social, emotional issues every day. They have the right to receive adequate support in order to live a deserved happy school life. Academic area is important in our society; nonetheless, educators should not overlook the development of social and emotional areas because the social emotional learning enhance the students' self-awareness, self-management, empathy, perspective taking, social interactions, decision making and cooperation.

The significance of this study is to prove that an effective expressive arts social emotional learning program could promote the social and emotional development of the students with ASD.

This case study revealed the need to further investigate the effectiveness of this integrative approach of expressive arts social emotional learning program in a group setting. Also, it will be interesting to examine the effectiveness of this expressive arts social emotional learning program with students without special needs because social emotional learning is for everyone.

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