

Adaptive Tool Reflection

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When I began conceptualizing my adaptive tool, I started my process by identifying my own needs. Throughout our class, I have been utilizing a lot of the same materials and techniques: paper, dry media, and a ruler. While idiosyncratic, the resulting art stays within the same range on the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC). From my inside/outside box to my mail art, and even many of our in-class art directives, I have been relying on much the same process to approach different subjects. The result is that I am staying within the same perceptual, cognitive, and symbolic range to address issues that may benefit from exploring affective, kinesthetic, and sensory states. Therefore, when designing my tool, I decided to break the mold and apply watercolor with far less control on a blank sheet of watercolor paper with no structural or geometric framework.

To engineer a lack of control in my watercolor application, I decided to bypass my hands and tie a string to two of my paintbrushes. One knot at the metal crimp and another at the back of the wooden handle allowed me to dangle and stabilize the brush in a downward position. In order to bypass my hands, I secured the brush to my left wrist by tying a wide loop on the end of the string and then I draped the remainder of the string's slack over my right wrist. Together, my wrists became a pulley system that I could utilize to adjust the brush's distance from the paper and color palette. Anytime I wanted to lift my brush from the paper, I just pulled my left wrist back and decreased the slack on the string over my right wrist. Like a construction crane, I turned my hips and upper body over to the palette and dipped my brush into my watercolor paints; and then turned back to the paper, lowered the brush onto the paper, and utilized my whole upper body to drag the brush across the paper's surface.

Because this technique was physically complex, I decided to keep my materials simple by limiting my color palette to the three primary colors (red, blue, and yellow) and using only two brush sizes (a #2 liner and a 3/4" flat). When I got bored with a particular color or size, I would wash my brush out, switch to another brush, and dip it into another color. With each successive layer, my strokes and overlapping colors increased the composition's variety. My #2 liner moved sensuously between the blockier 3/4" flat strokes and pulled colors into one another, creating an emergent medley of secondary colors. Overall, the process was invigorating and allowed me to have a purely affective and kinesthetic experience. As I moved my hips, torso, and arms, I felt some interesting guttural emotions arise and release through my strokes. While I am still processing exactly what these feelings meant, I acknowledge the benefit of having them pass through my body using this new modality.

I believe this modality could also benefit clients with similar blockages within their bodies who need to lose control and allow emotional energy to flow more freely from their gut and heart regions. If a client presented as depressed, under-aroused, having a low affect, or dissociated, I may encourage them to address their bodily blockages in this manner. Additionally, clients with a physical disability or certain motor impairments that decrease control may find this application of paint to be liberating and exciting. While I would still have to assist the client in washing and changing out brushes, I believe this adaptive tool assignment was a good first step at considering a more seamless process for clients with such disabilities or impairments.