

## Modern Art Therapy in Schools: A Public Health Initiative for Equal Opportunity

CARDIE Program by the National Education System: Ministry of Higher Education and Research in partnership with AFRATAPEM and the CESAM Research Laboratory

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### Abstract:

Submitted and approved

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### Article :

This feasibility study was inspired by various factors that led us to explore innovative approaches to support the education of children with special educational needs (SEN).

Three fundamental pillars were identified:

1. A legal framework on inclusive education: focusing on students with disabilities (Law 2005-102 of February 11, 2005).
2. A continuum of service obligations set out in official bulletins by the Ministry of National Education, including circulars on psychosocial risk prevention (n° 2013-035, March 29, 2013), dropout prevention (n° 2013-060, April 11, 2013), bullying prevention (n° 2013-100, August 13, 2013), and mental health first aid (NOR: TFPF2133602C, February 23, 2022).
3. An observation on delays in care (shortage of practitioners/medical deserts/notification delays from the Departmental Autonomy Office).

The foundation of this experimental project is Modern Art Therapy, a humanistic discipline combining art and medicine, which contrasts with traditional art therapy (art-based psychotherapy). Modern Art Therapy employs and evaluates the effects of aesthetics through artistic practice, aiming to uplift the potential and healthy aspects of individuals experiencing hardship. This approach, based on studies from the Modern Art Therapy School in Tours (AFRATAPEM), is used as a motivational tool in a preventive framework for school engagement and inclusion, highlighting students' strengths through the power and impact of art.

The protocol's objective lies in its innovative approach, utilizing modern art therapy to advance public policy on pedagogical practices and mental health care for school-aged adolescents. This tool is integrated into students' schedules, providing a framework for school re-engagement, inclusion, and well-being. Art therapy thus becomes a means of academic resilience, enhancing the school experience towards success, fulfillment, and equal opportunity. School staff receive training on the therapeutic framework and its objectives within the school environment.

### **Implementation Context**

According to the World Health Organization, mental health is “a state of well-being that allows each individual to realize their potential, face normal life challenges, work productively and contribute to their community.”

Childhood and adolescence are critical for psycho-affective development, learning effectiveness, and future adaptability as adults and citizens.

This program draws from various reports and scientific studies aiming to improve the health of students with behavioral issues and learning difficulties, including:

- The “Art Room” initiative in 40 schools across Oxfordshire, London, and Edinburgh, where art therapy was integrated into primary and secondary schools, yielding benefits in anxiety reduction, self-confidence, and social skills.
- A study published in *Neuropsychiatrie de l’Enfance et de l’Adolescence*, demonstrating that the quality of school experience impacts learning outcomes and that attention to self-esteem serves as a preventive measure against academic disengagement.
- A report by Christophe Marsollier during the February 5, 2019 conference, highlighting the link between students' physiological needs and school dropout risk.
- The 2022 National Study on Child Well-being (Enabee) conducted by Santé publique France in metropolitan France.

This project outlines the development of the protocol (tools/resources/methodology) and its implementation from the academic level to a national scale. Supported by the **Direction Générale de l’Enseignement SCOLAires** (DGESCO), this multi-site study has been conducted with 432 students across seven academies from 2018 to 2024, overseen by the Academic Research, Development, and Innovation Unit and the Higher Center for Art and Medicine Studies (AFRATAPEM's research laboratory). It adheres to ethical and regulatory guidelines governing support procedures.

### **Methodology :**

1. The organization follows several steps. Notably, before 2022, no public funding supported this program; starting in 2023, six institutions received financial support via the CNR-E7 fund, “Our School, Building It Together.” This funding enabled personnel training, significantly boosting their engagement in the program. The protocol is based on a proportional universal approach, allowing it to be reproduced

and expanded nationally, with a stronger presence in the Orleans-Tours Academy. Training sessions were held for staff (teachers/administrators/board members) to introduce the therapeutic framework, help identify students in distress (introverted or extroverted), and convey program objectives within the school environment.

2. Identified SEN students were referred by a multidisciplinary team for inclusion based on academic decline, absenteeism, behavioral issues, lack of belonging, and impacted self-esteem.
3. An initial meeting was held with students and families to explain the program and establish therapeutic objectives, with an adjusted school schedule for 1 hour per week.
4. This 12–14 week protocol included both individual and group sessions, focusing on artistic interests and socio-emotional skills to facilitate learning integration.

The final event showcased students' progress in an exhibition and interactive artistic sessions for students and parents, emphasizing psychosocial skill application.

Data were collected for analysis through standardized tools (Visual Analog Scales, Conners Questionnaires, Pronote survey, Harmonious Cube for art therapists).

The program considers various factors to address introverted and extroverted students, students with or without medical support, and gender differences.

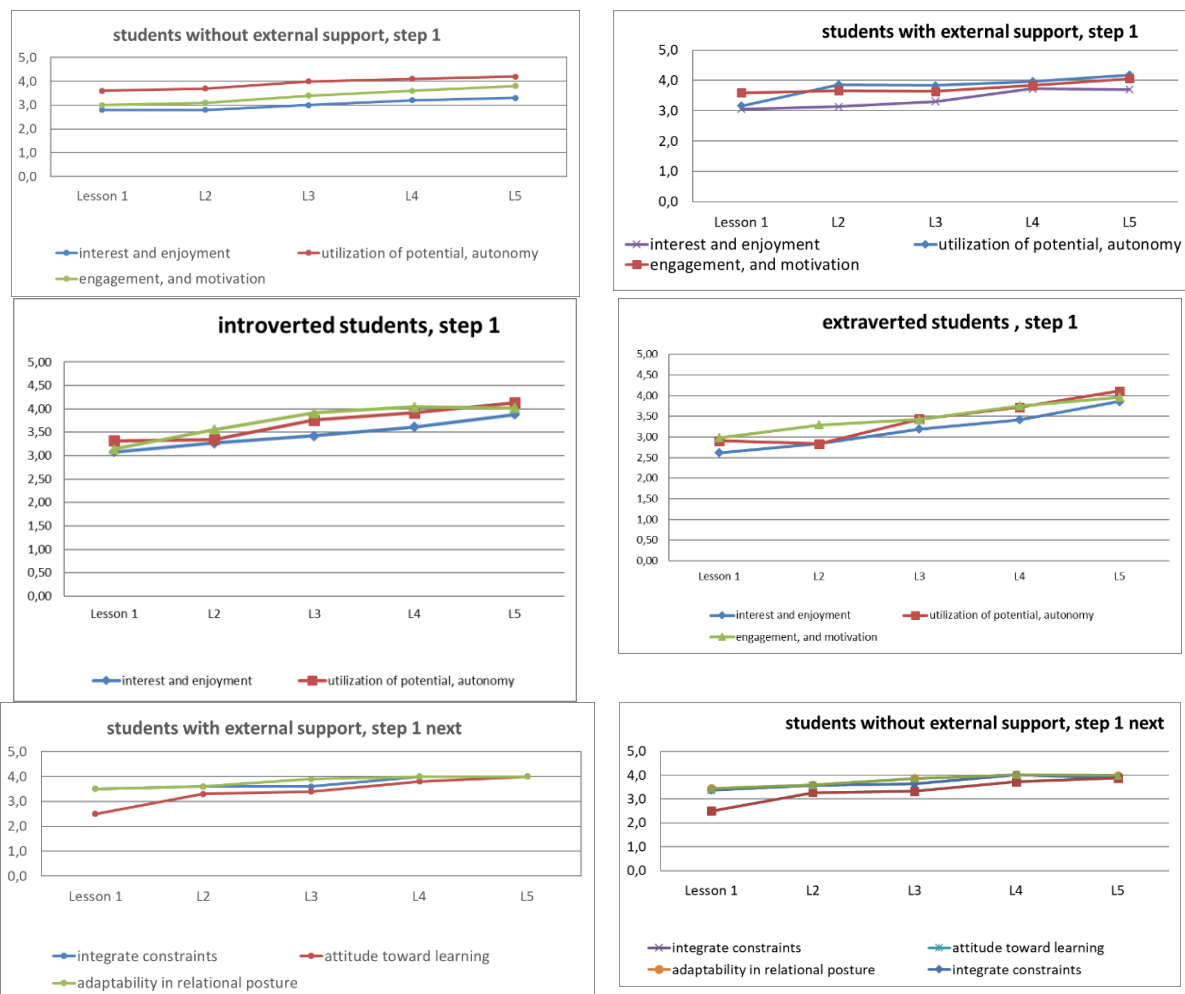
Artistic Medium		Social Skills	Cognitive Skills	Emotional Skills:	Basic Needs
Painting	Color medium enabling access to abstraction.	Verbal and non-verbal communication, emotional expression, feedback/critical judgment, empathy (understanding & listening), advocacy skills.	Decision-making, reapplication of prerequisites, development/sequencing/planning/problem-solving, critical thinking and self-assessment, relational and influential effects (media: messaging).	Managing frustration and stress during creative progression (mastery of relaxation techniques).	Self-esteem, security, belonging.
Collage	Selection and cutting, spatial composition/organization, message transmission.	Communicating a message, expressing ideas/preferences, fostering prosocial connections, building relationships through text/word/image/sketch/diagram assembly.	Idea enhancement, creating a mood board (thematic/reflexive organization), creative thinking (assembly/juxtaposition/superimposition/connections), decision-making/choice.	Potential for wonder and awe.	Autonomy, self-esteem, security, self-fulfillment.
Photo-Language	Contemplative time conducive to introspection, followed by sharing (individual and collective expression).	Problem-solving and discussing challenges, assertiveness (communicating a state/asking for help, respecting perspectives/states, empathy, listening, eloquence).	Attention (active awareness) and observation, ability to make choices and resolve issues, responding to instructions.	Recognizing and sharing emotional states, stress management (time constraints/talking stick).	Physiological (introspection/mental rest: rumination), security (trust for self-expression), belonging.

Drawing	Focus and concentration on technical skills.	Resilience under pressure (social norms of beauty/conformity), developing constructive relationships through art's relational effects.	Critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, analysis, and self-evaluation.	Using emotions to act appropriately and manage responses..	Autonomy, achievement, fulfillment, self-esteem and belonging, security (pencil as a familiar tool).
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**Table 1:** Examples linking artistic medium-specific characteristics with psychosocial skills and fundamental needs.

### Quantitative Data:

Step 1 of the protocol includes indicators related to interest and enjoyment, utilization of potential, autonomy, engagement, and motivation. These are coupled with assessments of the ability to integrate constraints, attitude toward learning, and adaptability in relational posture. While discrimination between Cohort 1 (students with external support) and those without does not show a significant differential, the distinction between extroverted and introverted profiles provides more insightful information



If we observe less difficulty in the “attitude toward learning” category among introverted student profiles, the general progression of other indicators shows a 1-point increase. However, for extroverted students, the attitude toward learning remains challenging and less stable. Conversely, the general progression of other indicators for this extroverted cohort exceeds a 1-point increase.

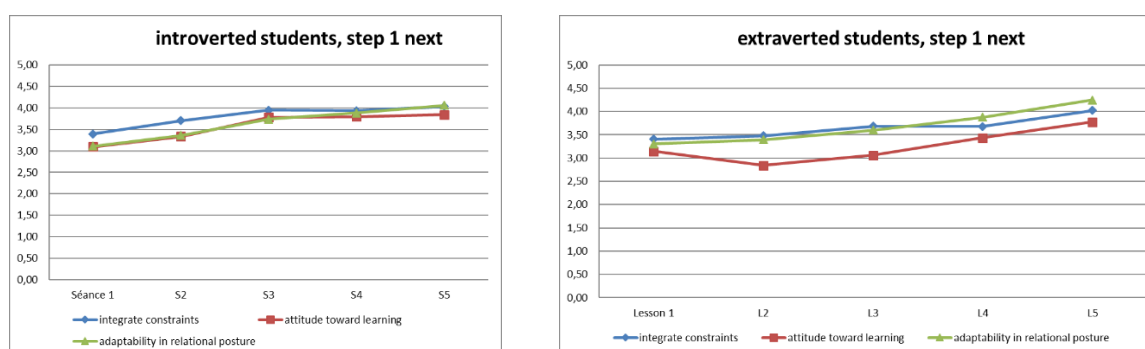


Chart 3: Analysis of Step 1 Data for Introverted and Extraverted Profiles

In Step 2, indicators around perseverance, pride, and psychosocial skills are evaluated. As with Phase 1, we find no significant differences between Cohorts 1 and 2. However, distinctions between introverted and extroverted profiles reveal notable variations and irregularities within the introverted cohort, while extroverted profiles tend to stabilize more quickly. Interestingly, a drop in scores during Week 11 (S11) appears correlated with anxiety about the closing event among extroverted students, contrasting with introverted students who approach this event with greater calm, sometimes experiencing a surge in motivation that prompts significant development in social skills.

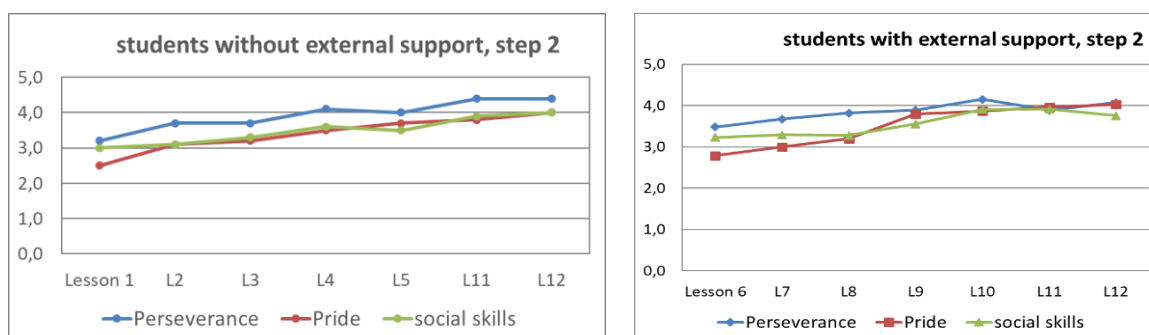


Chart 4: Analysis of Step 2 Data for Cohorts With and Without Medical Support

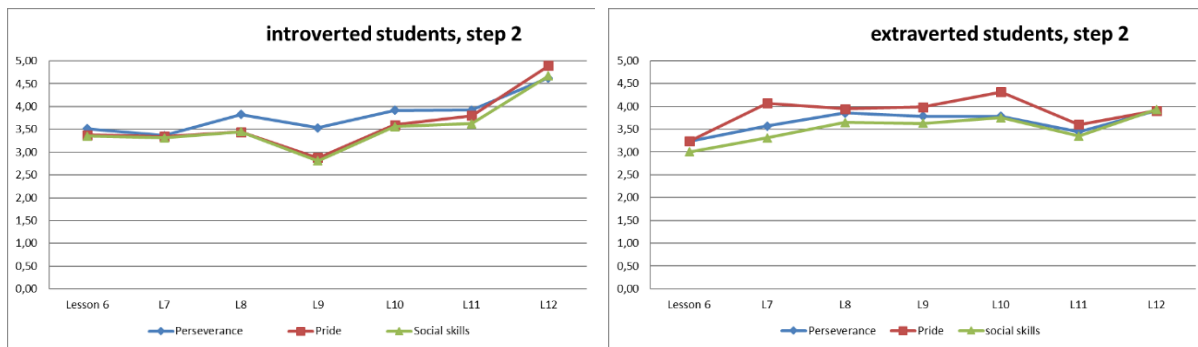


Chart 5: Analysis of Step 2 Data for Introverted and Extroverted Students Profiles

The following charts present average scores for key parameters—school motivation, workshop motivation, perceived difficulty, and effort made—evaluated for each cohort throughout the program from 2019 to 2023. A notable observation is that perceived difficulty consistently falls below the level of effort students must invest to achieve session objectives, whether these objectives focus on a technical skill or aesthetic refinement, depending on each student's project progress. Consequently, the art therapy goal has been to minimize the gap between perceived difficulty and the necessary effort, ensuring that students feel capable of meeting session demands without excessive strain.

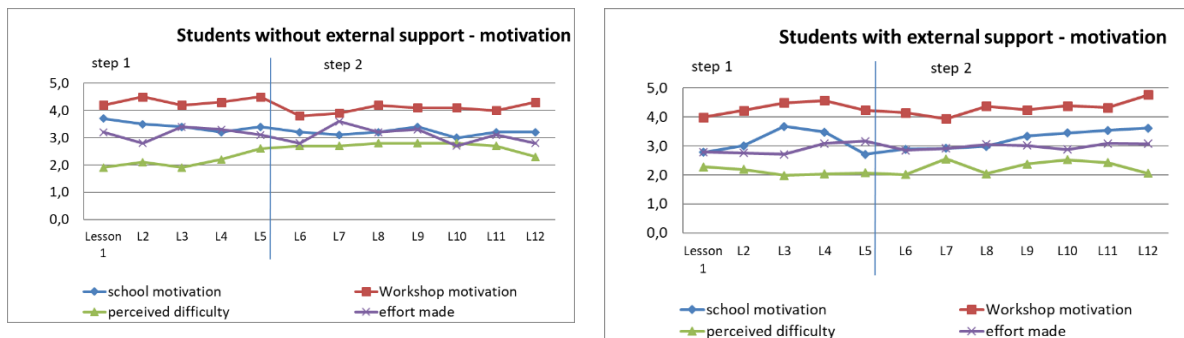


Chart 6 : Analysis of Information Related to the Evaluation of Motivation (Link Between Perceived Difficulty and Efforts made)

The analysis of gender discrimination provides insight into the engagement levels of girls throughout the entire support program, contrasting with only 3% of boys requesting to interrupt their participation.

At the conclusion of the program, the overall benefit is evaluated. For Cohort 1 (those receiving follow-up), 44% of teachers assess the benefits of the program as moderate, while 44% of students view them as very significant. Additionally, 33% of referring adults (parents and teachers) consider the benefits important.

This data suggests a disparity between how students and teachers perceive the program's impact, with students expressing a more positive view of its significance. It highlights the necessity for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of support programs to align with students' perceptions and needs, ensuring that both educators and students are on the same page regarding the program's effectiveness.

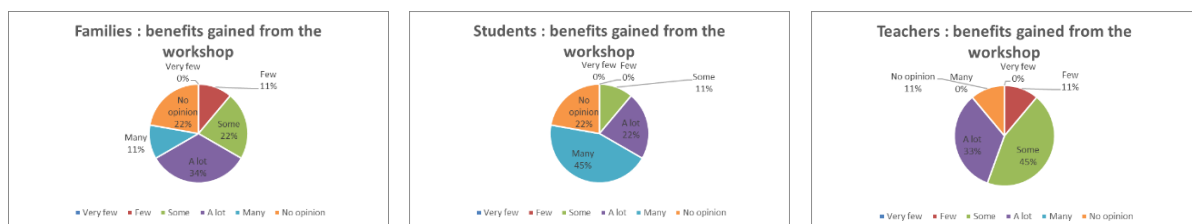


Chart 7 : Comparative Analysis of the Benefits of the Art Therapy Workshop for Students, Families, and Teachers (Cohort 1: Medical Follow-Up)

For cohort 2 (without external medical follow-up), 19% of students and teachers and 5% of families believe that the benefit of the workshop is low. A proportion of 14% of teachers and families, as well as 48% of students, feel that the benefit has been significant. The majority of teachers believe that the benefit is of moderate intensity, and none confirm a very significant benefit. However, 24% of families and 14% of students think that the benefit has been very important.

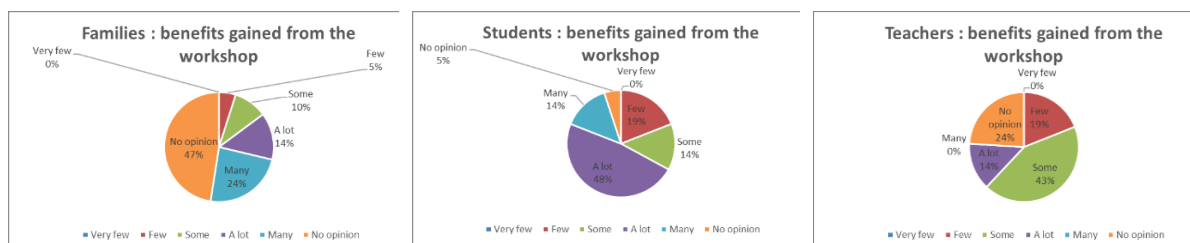


Chart 8 : Comparative analysis of the benefits of the art therapy workshop for students, families, and teachers (cohort 2: without follow-up)

Before the implementation of training programs for staff, we had an average participation rate of 54% in the survey conducted to evaluate the perception of the benefit of the system on the overall school climate. Post-training, participation increased to 64%. It appears that 72% indicate that the observable repercussions are very positive, compared to 16% for a very low value, and 2% have no opinion.

### Qualitative Data :

**Teachers** observe a significant increase in the enjoyment of effort and a sense of belonging (an increase of 1.5). **Students** have a more favorable perception of self-esteem (an increase of 0.6 points on a scale of 1 to 5). **Families** rate the benefit as important (4) to very important (5) on a scale of 1 to 5. 42. 59% of the staff report a positive impact on the school climate, rated between important (4) and very important (5). 85% of the comments reflect a positive effect on mood regulation and emotion management in the face of academic or social adversity.

### Conclusion :

The population that benefited from this innovative policy between 2018 and 2024 represents 5% of the total enrolled in each institution. 85% of the staff received pre-professional training that allowed for an understanding of the art therapy support and its implications in the school environment. The dominant artistic disciplines implemented during the support sessions are primarily drawn from the field of visual arts, although applied arts, theater, singing, and dance have also been involved. The initial results allow for a better determination of the indicators and a further reorientation towards criteria for evaluating mental health.

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