

Experiences of using art with middle school educators to examine burnout during the COVID-19  
Pandemic

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**ABSTRACT**

The following qualitative study analyzed the experiences of middle school educators' engagement in group art directives. Data was collected over a 4-week period, and a group semi-open interview was utilized to elicit information about educators' thoughts on using art in the workplace and reflection on their daily lives. The study explored gaps in art therapy literature such as art therapy and its benefits with educators in a group setting, if art aids educators with burnout, and finding an effective treatment for educator burnout due to an increase of educators leaving the profession from the Covid-19 pandemic. This qualitative study provided art therapy literature to better understand the lives of educators' burnout and emphasize work-related support using group art directives to provide emotional aid. This in turn will assist school administrations, art therapy professionals, and burnout literature alternative approaches to decreasing educators leaving the field and burnout among educators

*Keywords: Art therapy, Secondary educators, Burnout, Covid-19, and Work-related social support*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	2
ABSTRACT .....	3
I. INTRODUCTION .....	5
II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	12
Burnout .....	12
Educator Burnout and Covid-19 .....	14
Middle School Educators with Burnout in the United States .....	17
Challenges of Middle School Educators with Burnout .....	21
Psychological Theories .....	21
Current Approaches in Treating Burnout .....	24
Art Therapy and Burnout .....	27
Art Therapy with Educators .....	29
Group Art Directives and Group Connection .....	30
Group Art Directives and Stress Management .....	31
Group Art Directives and Meaning Making .....	32
III. METHODOLOGY .....	35
Participants .....	35
Research Design .....	37
Data Collection .....	38
Data Analysis .....	42
IV. RESULTS .....	44
Burnout .....	44
Daily Stressors .....	46
Self-Reflection .....	48
Group Support .....	56
V. DISCUSSION .....	59
Restatement of Purpose .....	59
Discussion .....	59
Limitations .....	60
Ethical Implications .....	61
Research Bias .....	62
Future Studies .....	62
Conclusion .....	63
REFERENCES .....	64
APPENDIXES .....	77
APPENDIX A: Participant Consent and Confidentiality Agreement Form .....	77
APPENDIX B: Participant Consent to Photograph and Audiotape Form .....	82
APPENDIX C: Group Art Directives and Process .....	83
APPENDIX D: Group Discussion Interview Questions .....	85
APPENDIX E: Table of Main Themes and Sub-Themes .....	86
APPENDIX F: Group Artwork .....	87

## CHAPTER I

### **Introduction**

Across the globe, there is a continual rise in the retiring of educators (Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014) caused by the phenomenon of educator burnout (Kirk & Walter, 1981). Yin, Huang, and Lee (2017) found that educator burnout was categorized into three different types of exhaustion: physical, mental, and emotional. In addition to the many forms of exhaustion educators encounter, Tsang (2018) found that educators also face isolation and powerlessness due to an increase in demand for higher performance ratings in schools, no support in the classroom, and having no voice with school administration. The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 and its remaining aftereffects exacerbated the daily stressors educators face and have been a huge source of burnout in the education field (Kazouh et al. 2020; Ozarkal & Bozyigit, 2020). Orzarkal & Bozyigit (2020) referred to the Covid-19 pandemic as having the most significant impact on the education system in history (United Nations, 2020). Additional stressors for educators due to the Covid-19 pandemic include consideration of health risks, worry of potential layoffs and cutbacks from state funding, challenges of teaching from home, and the loss of morale (Kazouh et al. 2020; Ozarkal & Bozyigit, 2020). These factors may contribute to the ongoing early-retirement rates of educators and newly graduated education students not beginning in the education field (Struyven & Vantourhout, 2014).

### **Importance of Study**

During the pandemic, I endured the challenges of being a college and career coach educator for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students. Being a new educator during the pandemic created obstacles such as going back and forth between virtual and in-person classes, lesson plans, and

making sure students were on track with assignments and high school career track. I became burned out amongst many other educators that I worked with. My burnout resulted in providing poorer quality of education, exhaustion at home and at work, pessimism, and withdrawal from colleagues. After leaving the profession, to continue working on my art therapy profession, I began to reflect on my burnout and the impact it potentially had on other educators and the quality of education during this challenging time. My experience, led to me exploring how educators were impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how art therapy could assist in the obstacles educators currently face today.

As stated previously, before the COVID-19 pandemic, global attrition rates continually rose for educators due to burnout (Struyven & Vanterhourout, 2014). When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in the United States education systems, new challenges presented themselves for educators that affected their psychological distress such as an increase in workload at home, learning new technology strategies for teaching, health risks of COVID-19, and changing routines such as social distancing and quarantining (Zadok-Gurman et al., 2020; Kazouh et al., 2020; Donista-Smidt & Ramot, 2020). Kurtz (2020) and Donista-Smidt & Ramot (2020) found that COVID-19 provided an increase in educator attrition by 32 percent, when educators indicated they would not have resigned earlier. Therefore, the administration system must investigate ways in assisting their educators, especially during the COVID- 19 pandemic to provide support and aid in times of distress (Smidt & Ramot, 2020).

Before the pandemic, there was also a continual lack of funding for needed resources, and many educators left the education field (Schneider-Levi et al., 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Education administrators need to seek a resource for their upcoming and current educators

to increase the quality of their work within their organization and with students (Habib, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic as discussed previously added more pressure on the administration to provide resources for educators, such as the use of technologies to provide engagement, reassurance of no layoffs due to state funding cutbacks, and emotional support for the ongoing challenges of educators (Donista-Smidt & Raton, 2020). The current study demonstrates the daily lives of educators during the COVID-19 pandemic by creating images within a group and can provide insight into what educators need from their school systems.

Zadok-Gurman et al. (2020) provided some approaches that are effective for treating educator burnout included: cognitive-behavioral therapy, positive psychology, meditation, and personal reflection. However, according to Inacu et al.'s (2017) metanalysis, the current effectiveness for educator burnout only treats the components of personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion. Therefore, there are gaps in the literature as to what techniques provide overall effectiveness for educator burnout. This study provided insight into if artmaking can be used as an effective approach to support all components of burnout with middle school educators.

Lastly, gaps in art therapy literature with educator burnout are a remaining issue. Art therapy research has only shown case studies on self-efficacy and reflective processes through art making and demonstrates that it can help decrease the feeling of burnout amongst classroom educators and an educator supervisor (Mckay & Barton, 2018). McKay and Barton (2018) however did not indicate if all components of burnout are diminished, or just one. Additionally, there is a lack of research examining group art therapy intervention and how it supports professional burnout among educators. Within a group setting, educators may be able to

accomplish an increase in work-related social support, which has been deemed a crucial role in diminishing burnout symptoms amongst educators (Florelli et al., 2016). Due to the gaps in research, my study seeks to utilize group art directives to better understand the lives of educators' burnout and emphasize work-related support within the group directives to provide emotional aid (Cobb, 1976).

As stated previously, Florelli et al. (2016) examined the importance of work-related social support and its effects on burnout symptoms with educators. Florelli et al. (2016) discussed a negative relationship between work-related social support and burnout symptoms, meaning the more work-related support presented, the fewer burnout symptoms experienced by participants. The designed group art directives aimed at workplace social support could provide a platform for educators to discuss and reflect on burnout due to the increased sense of social support in a group setting (Florelli et al., 2016).

The current study is guided by the current question: *What are the experiences of using art with middle school educators?*

The following study was created to increase the literature of art therapy to diverse populations such as educators in public school systems. This study also provides an understanding of how art can support middle school educators and the education system and provides insight from images as well as to discussion on how burnout has affected the lives of educators in the present.



### Definition of Terms

- **Art Therapy.** The integrative approach to therapy uses active art making, the creative process, psychological theory, and the establishment of the therapeutic relationship between individuals, families, and diverse communities (American Art Therapy Association, 2020; Reed et al. 2020).
- **Burnout.** In this study, burnout is defined by the following three subcategories: exhaustion which is demonstrated physically, mentally, and emotionally, depersonalization, and the lack of personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 1996; McKay & Barton, 2018). Burnout stems from ongoing excessive stress that can create the three dimensions of burnout (Lantieri et al., 2016). According to Szegeti et al. (2016), emotional exhaustion caused educators to lack excitement for their careers due to persistent tiredness. Szegeti et al. (2016) added to the definition of educator burnout by having a disinterest in work, colleagues, and students due to detachment. Lastly, lack of personal accomplishment is linked to burnout, and it is referred to as a sense of ineffectiveness towards a job (Szegeti et al., 2016).
- **COVID-19.** Also known as the Coronavirus disease of 2019, is a virus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) (Fauci et al., 2020). Covid- 19 was detected in the United States in December of 2019 (Fauci et al., 2020). Due to the rapid spread of infection, education systems had to provide alternative means for teaching (Daniel, 2020). Globally, many education systems had to provide online instruction rather than face-to-face contact, as well as create a new curriculum during the rise of Covid-19 numbers (Daniel, 2020).

- ***Expressive Therapies Continuum.*** The Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) is a model based on the creative process, human development level, and information processing during the creative process (Hinz, 2009). The ETC provides 6 levels of development: sensory, kinesthetic, perceptual, affective, cognitive, and symbolic. The component of creativity overarches all these components (Hinz, 2009).
- ***Perceived Work-Related Social Support.*** Workplace social support can be defined by the Job Demand resources theory demonstrated by Cobb (1976). Workplace social support is driven by the relationships found in the workplace environment (Cobb, 1976). These relationships consist of colleagues and administration and provide information about the occupational environment such as providing emotional aid (Cobb, 1976; Merida-Lopez et al., 2020). In this study, group art directive sessions consisted of the workplace social support network for educators and their colleagues (Merida-Lopez et al., 2019).
- ***Self-Efficacy.*** Self-efficacy was established by Albert Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive theory which explains that self-efficacy is defined as an individual's perception of their ability of success to accomplishing a certain outcome. Regarding educators, educator self-efficacy is created when an educator has the belief in their ability to complete a work-related task (Tchannen-Moran et al., 1998). Educator efficacy also has been negatively correlated with burnout symptoms (Hilger et al., 2020).
- ***Mindfulness.*** Based on Buddhist traditions, is described by Seo and Yuh (2022) as, "a process of bringing non-judgmental attention to moment-to-moment experiences." Seo and Yuh (2022) describe that mindfulness withholds 3 skills including focusing on the present rather than the past or future, interpreting situations "consciously" rather than "emotionally", and experiencing the moment non-judgmentally and not relating the

moment to “fears” or “wishes”. In this study, mindfulness will be explored through the results of the artmaking process of participants.

## CHAPTER II

### **Literature Review**

The following literature review provided the premise for the current study of how group art directives support middle educators and their experiences with burnout. The literature review discusses burnout, burnout amongst educators, burnout amongst middle school educators in the United States, and challenges with middle school educators' burnout. This review also explores workplace social support and its applicability to educator burnout, current approaches in treating educator burnout, art therapy with burnout, art therapy with middle school educators, group connection, stress management, and meaning making.

### **Burnout**

Burnout syndrome was first researched by Herbert Freudenberger (1974) and is now known to be the founding father of the concept (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). Freudenberger (1974) deemed burnout to be attributed to, "excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources" (pg.159) and found that detected symptoms such as fatigue, cynicism, and frustration were related to burnout (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017; Reith, 2018). Freudenberger (1974) also stated that individual personality factors can also contribute to the formulation of burnout. Freudenberger (1974) stated that individuals he observed to have burnout were more likely to be "dedicated and committed" (pg. 161). Heinemann & Heinemann (2017) discussed that Freudenberger's (1974) observations were based on a demanding workplace environment, and individuals that were observed had underlying motivations, were empathetic, and had an increase of personal involvement in the workplace when working with others.

Maslach & Leiter (2016) described that initial research on burnout stemmed from research based from interpersonal relationships, motivation, emotion, and interpretation of work attitudes and behavior. The foundational research provided the three themes of what determines burnout today which are: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Over the years, the development of burnout models has been formulated to better understand the causes and behaviors that are demonstrated by burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Current burnout models include the Job Demand Resource Theory (JD-R), Conservation of Resources Model (COR), Areas of Worklife (AW) (Cobb, 1976; Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The JD-R and COR models are similar in they demonstrate the relationship of the individual with the current resources that are provided to them (Cobb, 1976; Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993). However, JD-R model specifies that an individual's relationship to burnout occurs when there is an increase in work demands and there is limited access to resources to resolve demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

In contrast, the COR model is based on individual motivation that is presented when there is an unbalance of high demands and low resources (Bettini et al., 2020). Having high demands and low resources provided a lack of motivation to where individuals eventually attire from their profession (Bettini et al., 2020).

The AW theory is in opposition to the JD-R and COR model, the AW theory proposes that there is an imbalance between the nature of the individual and the nature of the job (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). This then poses increased stress and leads to burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Currently, there are 6 components that create a "mismatch" between the individual and the job

(Maslach & Leiter, 2016). These include control, reward, workload, sense of community, fairness, and values of the individual and the job (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

These models help better understand the formulation of burnout and create better preventative measures in the workplace. However, these models do not pinpoint the direct cause of burnout, due to each case of burnout being highly individualized due to personal and occupational demands and resources (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017).

Burnout literature, on the contrary, is still continually growing even though burnout is still a contested diagnosis not yet recognized by the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2013). Heinemann & Heinemann (2017) stated that in 2011, 135 publications were released regarding burnout in the medical community. This has grown tremendously in the past 20 years, with over 20 burnout-related publications released since 1991 (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). Literature related to burnout in other fields of work has also grown due to an increase in work demands and societal reflection on the concept of burnout (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). Occupations or fields of work that have been added to burnout include, but are not limited to healthcare workers, dental hygienists, military personnel, college students, and specifically educators (Adler et al., 2017; Cohan et al. 2020; Green-Mckenzie, et al. 2020; Norman et al., 2021; Woo et al., 2019).

### **Educator Burnout and COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided unpredictable circumstances for educators globally (Daniel, 2020). During the initial start of the pandemic, educators had to alter the curriculum due to last-minute government protocols, learn new strategies in teaching, and be able to meet teaching demands in an online environment (Daniel, 2020; Kim et al., 2020). Allen,

Jerrim, & Sims (2020) conducted a survey of 8,000 primary and secondary educators as well as school leadership in England to better seek answers on how the education system has been impacted by COVID-19. Allen et al. (2020) found that there was a spike in work-related anxiety at the beginning of the first stages of online learning. They found that work-related anxiety was at 10 percent pre-remote learning on March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020, and escalated to 38 percent on March 15, 2020, due to switching to online learning platforms (Allen et al. 2020).

In addition to Allen et al.'s (2020) findings, Steiner and Woo (2021) conducted a survey of 1,006 willing K-12 educator participants in the United States to research the frequency of experiencing job stress, depressive symptoms, burnout, and coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings showcased that 25 percent of educators surveyed were willing to leave the education field, and 50 percent of the educators willing to leave were African American educators (Steiner & Woo, 2021). Steiner & Woo (2021) demonstrated that 78 percent of participants experienced job-related stress, which is relatively high in comparison to the national average of 40 percent of U.S adults in the workforce. Discussion of job-related stress, burnout, coping abilities, and burnout symptoms provided insight on initial stressors experienced which include engaging students on an online platform, remote teaching, maintaining a connection with staff, and communication with students and families.

Chan et al. 2021 found similar findings with 151 elementary educators surveyed about job stress and about unclear role expectations. In the survey, it was noted that emotional exhaustion was attributed to workload stress and school connectedness. However, Chan et al. (2021) provided open-ended questions for educators to answer to provide insight as to what would be beneficial in increasing their self-efficacy. Educators recommended that they should be

given increased time to collaborate with colleagues about instruction in the classroom, support from children and parents, and autonomy in the schedule and design of the curricula (Chan et al. 2021). These suggestions were deemed beneficial, so educators were not overly stressed or burned out during the pandemic (Chan et al., 2021).

Hilger et al. (2021) also explored educators' self-efficacy during the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite other research providing indicators of burnout or job anxiety, Hilger et al. (2021) wanted to see the difference in self-efficacy levels between different categories of educators including instruction level, type of instruction used, location of the school, and years of experience during the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey constructed had 361 participants across the United States and provided a variety in instruction level, location, and years of experience (Hilger et al., 2021). Hilger et al. (2021) found self-efficacy in hybrid models of teaching, both online and in-person education, and 100 percent of online teaching platforms had lower self-efficacy in comparison to only in-person teaching curricula. Contrary to their study's hypothesis, there was no difference between years of experience or the location of the school in relation to educators' self-efficacy levels.

Pressley et al. (2021) found contradicting findings when they analyzed United states elementary school educators and their job anxiety levels one month into the fall school year of 2020. Out of the 329 elementary educators that were surveyed 40 percent of educators stated their anxiety about beginning the 20-21 school year decreased (Pressley et al., 2021) However, 50 percent of the sample also indicated that beginning the new school year after the first half of the pandemic, neither changed nor rather increased (Pressley et al., 2021). Pressley et al., (2021) also found similar findings to Hilger et al. (2021), where both studies indicated that educators



that were only on an online teaching platform reported an increase in ratings of anxiety in comparison to hybrid or in-person models of teaching. This research showcased that impacts of job stress or anxiety may be found at the individual level or the environment in which the educator is positioned (Pressley et al., 2021). This research also did not identify components of burnout, rather they focused on pre-post anxiety levels.

Due to the continuing challenges in the education system, increased work demands, and decrease in self-efficacy during the pandemic, it has established an increase in burnout among educators. These obstacles have increased educator attrition rates and educator shortages across the United States (Carver-Thomas & Burns, 2021). According to Carver-Thomas & Burns (2021), in California, 9 out of the 17 districts have shortages in math and science educators, and 7 out of 17 districts lack special education educators. Little research has been provided nationally on the accrued educator shortage. However, this is a precursor of what is to come if the demands of educators are decreased and if burnout remains prevalent for the remainder of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Middle School Educators in the United States**

Kusy & O’Leary-Driscoll (2020) researched burnout amongst educators and deemed that burnout is the leading cause of leaving the education field. However, burnout literature in the United states has little use in sampling the middle school educator population. The study collaborated with public middle school educators based in a town setting. Vilorio (2016) provides that in 2014 there were approximately 627,500 middle school educators within the United States and that there would be a 6 percent increase of educators between 2014-2024

resulting in 665,150 educators. However, Vilorio (2016) also provided that 175,500 educator openings will be available from 2014-2024.

In addition to Vilorio (2016) study, Manju (2018) states that 25 percent of graduates from a teaching program do not enter the education field and after 5 years, 25 percent of educators leave the field, and never return because of burnout. Due to attrition rates and turnover, research has investigated how burnout can be one of the leading contributors to all educators. The contributors of burnout and the challenges all educators face when suffering from burnout is expansive.

However, there is little research specifically observing middle school educators and their challenges and contributors to burnout. Helou's et al. (2016) study provided insight, which did not highlight autonomy and powerlessness as the factors related to burnout in the population of Lebanese educators that was highlighted in the introduction of the study by Struvyen and Vantourhout (2014). Helou et al. (2016) use of 9 retired educators' interviews, reflection journals, and Maslach Burnout Educator Survey (1996) results showed that 92 participants burnout into three significant categories: school-related factors, classroom related factors, and personal factors (Maslach et al., 1996). Burnout school-related factors that were highlighted in the study were the power of administration, negative student and parent relationships, and relationships with other colleagues (Helou et al., 2016). Classroom-related factors that contributed to burnout included: lack of discipline, lack of authority, and little input and assistance for classroom size and management (Helou et al., 2016). Lastly, personal factors that were emphasized in the study were: no preparation for expectations of the classroom, and

demographics such as age and gender contributed to the increase or decrease of depersonalization in educator burnout (Helou et al., 2016).

Similarly, to Helou et al. (2016) results, Bottani et al. (2019) used a sample of 225 educators in 33 low-income middle schools to find the correlation between job resources, stress, burnout, and demands. Bottani et al. (2019) provided self-reports for educators and classroom observations. Bottani et al. (2019) discussed that factors such as behavior management, disruptive behavior, and classroom practices were causes of stress and burnout for educators. It was also emphasized that female educators, white educators, the lack of resources in the classroom, and behavior management may also contribute to significant stress and burnout.

Terros (2017) added qualitative data that explored Helous et al al. (2016) categories of burnout. Terros (2017) completed one on one interviews with 15 participants of different instruction level in the middle school system, experience, and gender and explored the main themes of burnout among the sample. Terros (2017) found six common themes among participants that led to symptoms of burnout. These included: workload, teaching style, administrative support, taking on too much, feelings, and health issues.

Terros (2017) also found that most educators had an overwhelming sense that work demands were continuously rising every year due to papers, testing, and evaluation of lesson plans and curricula. In relation to the classroom and school-related factors, Terros (2017) stated mixed input on the presence and support of educational administration. Terros (2017) determined that many participants were frustrated and felt that the administration included them as being a part of the school team and felt that their voice was not considered in decision-making.

Personal factors such as teaching style were also found to be instrumental in leading to burnout for middle school educators (Terros, 2017). Terros (2017) stated that most participants were strict educators in the classroom and wanted structure. Terros (2017) emphasized that strict personality types are more commonly prone to burnout rather than other educators that may differ in a more laid-back personality. Other personal factors that led to burnout symptoms were participants were providing themselves with more responsibility. Terros (2017) discussed this demonstrated educators' willingness to take on to many responsibilities to receive acceptance within the school community (Terros, 2017).

Due to increased negative emotions attached to stress and burnout symptoms linked to differential factors, educators had an increased feeling of leaving the education profession altogether (Terros, 2017). Secondly, many educators discussed that due to the increase in stress, many had developed health issues such diabetes, high blood pressure, depression, anxiety, disturbance in sleep, and headaches or migraines (Terros, 2017).

Research has aimed to focus on personal factors, relationships, and environmental factors such as classroom behavior or class management as contributors to the cause of burnout. This way researchers can target initial stressors to provide effective preventative care. However, researchers have tried to explore educator burnout and demographic differences such as age and gender. Literature that focuses on the correlation between educator burnout and participant demographics such as age, gender, and race is inconsistent especially with middle school educators. Koruklu et al. (2012) sampled 552 middle school educators with a survey comparing burnout level and personal information. Korukulu et al. (2012) suggested that educators that are beginners or that are well-experienced report lower burnout levels. Additionally, they observed

that younger educators experience a higher level of burnout in comparison to educators that have more experience. The research study mentioned previously found the same results as younger educators in their study demonstrated increased burnout levels, however, it only correlated with the burnout symptom of depersonalization (Bottani et al., 2019). The results of both studies of Bottani et al. (2019) and Korukulu et al. (2012) had younger educators experiencing higher levels of burnout in comparison to experienced educators.

### **Challenges with Middle School Educator Burnout**

Due to burnout, many educators face daily challenges in the classroom. Bottani et al. (2019) stated that burnout can lead to significant negative psychological challenges. Choi (2018) examined that the increase in burnout has a longitudinal relationship with mental health issues such as suicide, depression, and anxiety. This may be one of the many reasons as to why educators leave the field. On top of the significant number of stressors that are provided from burnout, even for an experienced educator, the quality of education provided to students will diminish (Bottani et al., 2019). If the quality of education diminishes on behalf of burnout it then can affect student and educator relationships, engagement with innovative material, and negative consequences with student academics, behavior, and classroom dynamic (Bottani et al., 2019; Braun et al., 2019; Breeman et al., 2015). Due to the challenges with mental health that burnout has given educators, this prompts the importance to research what resources we can provide educators for preventative care and upkeep for the continual quality of education to increase.

### **Psychological Theories**

For this study, the theory used originates with the Job Demand Resource Theory (JD-R) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). This theory proposed there is a relationship between work

characteristics (job resources and or demands) and individual components such as health, wellbeing, motivation, and work engagement and outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Derived from the job demand resources theory (Baker & Demerouti, 2017; Merida-Lopez et al., 2019; Russell et al., 2020), is the job resource of work-related social support discussed by Cobb (1976).

Workplace-related social support is an accumulation of relationships within the workplace environment. These relationships consist of colleagues or administration and they provide information about the occupational environment such as providing emotional aid (Cobb, 1976; Merida-Lopez et al., 2020). Work-related social support literature with educators provides the importance of the use of job demand resource theory in developing the group art directives for this study.

Educators have continuous interactions with work-related relationships such as colleagues, administration, students, and families (Florilli et al., 2016; Pietarianen et al., 2013). Due to the recurrence and the importance of professional relations with educators, researchers investigate how social support in the workplace can better treat symptoms of burnout (Florilli et al., 2016). Florelli et al. (2016) provided surveyed results from 149 Italian primary school educators to show the correlation between burnout and the importance of social support in the workplace for educators. Florelli et al. (2016) found that the increase or decrease of social support affected all dimensions of burnout symptoms on the Maslach Burnout Inventory sheet. This shows that relationship of social support can help diminish burnout symptoms amongst educators and that is why it will be focused on in this study.

Chengting et al. (2015) found comparable results as Florelli et al. (2016). Chengting et al. (2015) studied 307 Chinese middle school educators and surveyed using the Wong Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, Maslach Burnout Inventory, and an adapted workplace social support scale to observe if social support was the mediator between burnout and educator emotional intelligence. Chengting et al. (2015) results examined that perceived workplace social support and burnout are negatively correlated and provided 47 percent of the variance between work-related social support and burnout. These results depicted that if educators maintain high levels of perceived workplace social support it is possible it can be a protecting factor from symptoms of burnout amongst educators, and that it is recommended to provide more social support to colleagues and administration for treatment of burnout (Chengting et al., 2015).

Sun et al. (2019) added to workplace social support research. Their results concluded that social support was a mediator for both mindfulness and burnout symptoms by their research on 307 Chinese special education educators. Sun et al. (2019) did not differentiate personal and workplace social support in their research, however the findings provided that social support amongst educators with burnout is in fact important for diminishing burnout. Another study that reiterated the same findings was Kinman et al. (2011). Kinman et al. (2011) conducted research using surveys asking 628 secondary educators about their emotional labor, burnout, and workplace social support. Their results concluded that educators that reported higher levels of workplace social support also reported higher levels of personal accomplishment and job satisfaction, and lower levels burnout.

Meredith et al. (2020) however, provided opposing research that explored how burnout symptoms can become “contagious” amongst colleagues. Meredith et al. (2020) cross-examined

the concept of “burnout contagion” meaning the transference of burnout symptoms amongst relationships. In this study, they cross examined 931 secondary educators, however analyzed 578 of those educators for long term effects of burnout contagion. Their research highlighted that burnout symptoms can spread amongst colleagues that had a better relational connection through the act of sharing feelings of burnout symptoms (Meredith et al. 2020).

Helou et al. (2016) added to workplace social support literature by providing a survey of 9 educators that left the education field and 92 educators actively teaching. In their results, educators stated that issues with relationships with colleagues, school policies, and administrative relationships can cause major burnout. However, their results also concluded that support from colleagues, families, and friends does not cause burnout, it is the educators remaining in the education field (Helou et al., 2016). This drives the question is there any benefit in workplace social support at all? However, due to the prevalence in research and observation, there is still a need for workplace social support amongst educators and the continuation to improve research to better understand its value (Helou et al., 2016; Inancu et al., 2018; Manju, 2018; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014; Tsang, 2018). The following study has been developed to create group art directives that emphasize work-related social support due to its effects on burnout.

### **Current Approaches to Treating Burnout with Educators**

There are several different approaches for treating burnout with educators. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) studied that the increase of attrition and emotional exhaustion for educators can affect the education of future students due to negative attitudes, withdrawal, and loss of passion for education (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Currently, school administrations have tried to



appease the symptoms of burnout by enlarging classroom sizes and/or offering new educational instruction (Schneider-Levi et al., 2020). Oakes et al. (2013) provided an example of the previous statement by implementing a three-tiered model based upon giving resources to middle school educators. The three-tiered model focused on providing a positive school environment and unmet needs, assisting educators with resources for students that need academic or behavioral support in the classroom, and the last tier relates to the highest needs of students in the classroom that may need to be met by the educator (Oakes et al., 2013). Oakes (2013) explained that with better prevention models this then could increase the efficacy of educators that would better help them with burnout, the academic achievement of students, and student-educator relationships.

Similarly, McCullough et al. (2021) studied a preventative model providing resources to educators and students. Instead of using a three-tier model, McCullough et al. (2021) used a program called BEST in CLASS-E, which focused on increasing positive interactions between educators and students and providing resources to children with behavioral disorders from first through third grade. McCullough et al. (2021) provided results that educators reported no significance in increasing their self-efficacy and reporting lower burnout symptoms overall in the experimental group and control group. However, McCullough et al. (2021) reported that out of the 46 elementary school educators there was less reported emotional exhaustion after receiving the preventative educator course in the experimental group.

However, prevention resource models such as Oakes et al. (2013) and McCullough et al. (2021), are set aside due to limits in funding (Schneider-Levi et al., 2020). Administration needs to seek a resource that supports all aspects of burnout that educators endure. Lastly,

administrators need to observe newer resources for their upcoming and current educators to increase the quality of their work within their organization and with students (Habib, 2020).

Inancu et al. (2018) provided education literature with an effective meta-analysis of the different approaches in educator and burnout literature to compare methods that provide significance in diminishing negative burnout symptoms. Some of the following interventions were mentioned in the meta-analysis: cognitive behavioral therapy, professional development, mindfulness, social support, and psychoeducational approach. After analyzing 23 controlled trials of literature on educators with burnout, Inacu et al. (2018) stated that the current treatment methods have small significance overall. However, mindfulness practices provided significance in decreasing the burnout symptom of emotional exhaustion (Inancu et al., 2018). Social support was also mentioned as helping with personal achievement in reducing burnout symptoms with educators (Inancu et al., 2018). No research has deemed one intervention more crucial to specific populations in education. However, the hope is to find if art can support middle school educators with burnout. The following sections emphasized the use of art therapy with burnout and art therapy with middle school educators with burnout.

Inacu et al. (2018), however, did not mention recent research on preventative techniques such as prayer treatment studied by Chirico et al. (2020). Chirico et al. (2020) compared a control group of 25 educators and 25 educators that participated in prayer sessions and reflections over the course of eight weeks in an Italian Catholic School. The study required the experimental group of educators to take part in a thirty-minute training session twice a week for 8 weeks that focused on meditative prayer and connection with the divine, as well as individualized prayer and group prayer reflection. Chirico et al. (2020) found that the prayer

group resulted in higher job satisfaction, well-being, and reduction of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Chirico et al. (2020) provides an example of alternative ways to prevent burnout amongst educator, however, was limited to a population that was already exposed to Christian prayer due to the location of the sampling.

There are several ways in which literature has provided research on how to prevent burnout, or what type of care is beneficial in the reduction of burnout symptoms amongst educators. However, most education literature has not explored how art therapy can benefit the education system, and better equip educators in the upcoming future. The following sections hope to demonstrate a better understanding of art therapy with burnout and art therapy with educators.

### **Art Therapy and Burnout**

The literature on art therapy used with occupational burnout has been with numerous populations. Gam et al. (2016) discusses 140 responses from art therapists that answered questionnaires revolved around burnout, self-efficacy, and stress coping strategies. Gam et al. (2016) found that art therapists that had more supervision reported less emotional burnout symptoms. This may take part because the art therapist was able to go over issues in the session or transference (Gam et al., 2016). Gam et al. (2016) also found that self-efficacy has a positive correlation with the burnout component of personal accomplishment. This means, that if one has greater self-efficacy the individual also has an increase in personal accomplishment in their work (Gam et al., 2016). Gam et al.'s (2016) research provides a discussion that art therapists with a sense of self-efficacy may help with personal accomplishment which may be a contributor to preventative care for burnout.

Hyatt (2019) also believes similarly to Gam et al. (2016) that art therapists should decrease isolation and have a sense of communication and community with other art therapists to have longevity and vitality in the work of the art therapy field. Hyatt (2019) on the other hand provides her individual experience with a compassion fatigue memoir exploring her reflections of work with trauma and her own trauma as a child with chronic illness and her family. Nonetheless, Hyatt (2019) provides literature that demonstrates that art can provide healing, growth, and resilience to stay in the art therapy field.

Art therapy is also used as preventative care for other populations such as palliative care workers suffering from burnout. Potash et al. (2014a) conducted a quasi-experimental study that provided the opportunity for diverse types of palliative care workers such as nurses, social workers, counselors, clergy, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and volunteers to receive art therapy-based supervision or skills-based supervision in Hong Kong. 69 participants that were enrolled in the art-based supervision completed art therapy interventions such as creating art related to interactions with patients, stress felt by their work, the meaning of their work, and art related to their present feelings. These sessions took place once in a six-week period.

In comparison to the 3-day, six-hour skills-based supervision with 64 participants, Potash et al. (2014a) found that the art-based supervision significantly reduced the component of both physical and emotional exhaustion with their participants in contrast to the skills-based supervision. Potash et al.'s(2014a) discussion demonstrates the result may have been due to the art-based group having the opportunity to reflect on their emotional awareness due to their occupation. Potash et al. (2014) also showcases that the art-based group scored higher in

emotional awareness. This could potentially be due to responding to other group members' images and experiences in comparison to the skills coping group (Potash et al., 2014).

Additionally, the arts-based group decreased their fear of death and anxiety and increased awareness and attentiveness to tasks in the workplace. Potash et al. (2014a) literature demonstrates that art therapy-based supervision can be a preventative force for individuals suffering from occupational burnout by providing emotional awareness reflection, the ability for group discussion of similar stressors in the workplace, and increased competency in the workplace (Potash et al., 2014a; Hyatt, 2019).

### **Art Therapy with Educators**

Currently, there is not much literature on art therapy interventions for secondary school educators or educators in general. The only research that provides insight into this concept is the observations of McKay and Barton (2018). Their experiment utilized art-based reflection to create and increase resiliency to combat burnout symptoms (Mckay & Barton, 2018). The study observed two educators and one educator supervisor in a secondary school in Australia. Participants were given the opportunity to engage in a two-year program that provided support to educators who had no set roles after the diminishment of a literacy program. The three participants cooperated for six to eight school terms and provided the most data for Mckay and Barton's (2018) case studies. Mckay and Barton (2018) research provided observation of the lives of the secondary school educators and supervisor's careers, and participants provided a reflection on their burnout and the resilience from overcoming symptoms. Through the participants' reflective journaling and art making, participants achieved self-reflection that led to a greater awareness of the whole self which is substantial in minimizing the risk of burnout.

McKay and Barton (2018) found in their transcribed interviews that educators have lost autonomy in decision-making due to a lack of support from the administration. McKay and Barton (2018) also discovered that art-based reflection can increase well-being and resilience in the educator community with constant practice over time. Secondly, they brought forth a need for more research using art therapy interventions in the educator community.

Mckay & Barton (2018) provided limitations to their study, such as a small sample and demographics of the educators. Other limitations that inspired the current study is the absence of emphasis on social support amongst educators in which literature provides is a desired need amongst educators to combat burnout (Helou et al., 2016; Inancu et al., 2018; Manju, 2018; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014; Sun et al., 2019; Tsang, 2018). This has led to the research study emphasizing the use of group art directives rather than individual case studies in hopes to provide workplace social support amongst educators to deepen the discussion of the experience of their lives as middle school educators. The following are group art directives explored in this study: stress management, group connection, and meaning-making with educators.

### **Group Art Directive and Group Connection**

Riley (2001) discussed the benefits of group art therapy and what can be fostered within a session. Riley (2001) examined that group processing of an image can provide advantages when being compared to individual processing of an image. Riley (2001) discussed that an image may have several different meanings to individuals in the group, however, the art can provide a platform for discussion. With an introduction to creating images and discussion, the group art process can increase intimacy and can create cohesiveness with fellow members of the group (Riley, 2001). Art in the group can also provide opportunities for group members to be

expressive in their own way and for it to be observed by the leader and by other group members. This allows for both an individual experience with the image as well as a shared experience with other members to take place and provide different reactions and thoughts that may be needed by the individual member (Riley, 2001).

The current study is not supplying group art therapy sessions, due to not being a licensed art therapist. However, the researcher is providing similar art directives that derive from research that can potentially help educators experience burnout. The study has developed all group art directives that can provide middle school educators the opportunity for intimacy, cohesiveness, and support through the shared experiences of being a middle school educator (Riley, 2001). This then can help with creating workplace social support which can assist in helping with burnout amongst educators (Cobb, 1976; Merida-Lopez et al., 2020). Art directives that solely focus on group interaction in the current study are group collage making and the teamwork treasure map. The group collage directive is in hopes to provide educators to discuss their shared experiences of their overall goals as an educator with their colleagues (Riley, 2001) In the teamwork treasure map, this directive is based on the support that middle school educators can provide one another in their school system. Secondly, it allows each individual participant to have the shared experience of teamwork with other participants, but also acknowledging each individual participants way of communication and interaction (Riley, 2001).

### **Stress Management Art Directive with Educator Burnout**

The group art directive pertaining to stress management utilized in the study was inspired by the work of Potash et al. (2016b). Potash et al. (2016b) designed an art therapy session with supervisee palliative care workers suffering burnout in Hong Kong. In one session of art making,

end of life care workers was asked to “create an image of their stress” (Potash et al., 2016b). Potash et al. (2016b) found that participants were able to identify stress management strategies with their daily stressors and found the image as a metaphor to the stress they endured. The hope for the current study is to use the stress management directive developed by Potash et al. (2016b) with educators to see if this art directive assists middle school educators experience with burnout, and to discover how art directives can be beneficial in potentially developing stress coping strategies. The stress management directive is mentioned in the methodology under the third art directive used with middle school educators in the current study.

### **Meaning Making Art Directive with Educator Burnout**

This study also uses Potash et al. (2016b) meaning making group art directive that was used in supervision with end-of-life care workers. Potash et al. (2016b) study discussed that the “meaning making art directive” premised discussion of the main reasons and benefits that came from the work of palliative care workers. Due to the art directive, supervisees found moments in which provided seeing the meaning of their jobs such as providing comfort to individuals who were dying or helping their family during the passing of a loved one (Potash et al., 2016b). Potash et al. (2016b) discussed that the directive helps re-emphasize the meaning in the supervisees work, and that these thoughts could help in times of frustration. The current study used the mentioned directive aiming for educators to have time to reflect on their own meaning as to why they chose the education profession. Potentially, the directive may reclaim the meaning of what it is to be an educator with participants and can assist their experience with burnout. Meaning making with educators is discussed in the methodology section under the fourth art directive to better understand how the directive is applied to middle school educators.



### **Summary of Literature Review**

Current research provides a wealth of knowledge about the study of educators suffering from burnout, however there is room for growth in this area of literature. Burnout is a complex idea and there are numerous ideas as to what causes burnout amongst educators. Tsang (2018) demonstrated that isolation and powerlessness was the cause of burnout amongst the sample collected from Hong Kong. Helou et al. (2016) accredited possible burnout causation to heavy workload and issues with colleagues and administration. Despite research findings being mixed on causation of burnout amongst educators, workplace social support is an emphasized concept that continues to be researched with burnout and educators and is used in the current study (Helou et al., 2016; Inancu et al., 2018, Manju, 2018; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014; Tsang, 2018).

Treatment of burnout for educators does highlight this topic of workplace social support as preventative concept to treat educator burnout (Iancu et al., 2018). However, there were many diverse types of treatment that has been researched and utilized currently. Other types of treatment included in the review were social emotional skills, professional development, and mindfulness (Iancu et al., 2018). Despite all these interventions, Inancu et al. (2018) meta-analysis deemed mindfulness as the most significant in decreasing emotional exhaustion and increasing personal accomplishment. Secondly, social support was only significant in helping personal achievement in treatment of burnout.

Currently there is present research on how art therapy can be used as a preventative measure for occupational burnout with palliative workers, art therapists themselves, and possibly used as supervision practices. However, Mckay and Barton (2018) provided a glimpse of

probable research into the educator community that is suffering from burnout. Their research provided the hope of art therapy limiting burnout symptoms and increasing resiliency to overcome symptoms (Mckay & Barton, 2018). The future study hopes to explore how group art directives support middle school educators with burnout. This study also aims to emphasize work related social support for group art directives to provide emotional aid for middle school educators and their experiences.

## CHAPTER III

### **Methodology**

This study used a qualitative approach to collect data and analyze the lived experiences of middle school educator burnout with the use of group art directives. The following study consisted of 3 participants from a public middle school in central Kentucky. Participants took part in a group art directive once a week for a period of 4 weeks. Participants took part in a weekly group art directive for a total of four weeks. Participants engaged in group art directives together followed by a group discussion. I thematically analyzed group discussion responses based on the art directive that was provided immediately before the discussion. This study aimed to answer the following research question:

*What are the experiences of using art to examine middle school educator burnout?*

### **Participants**

Participants for this study were recruited using convenience sampling due to my accessibility of local middle schools in central Kentucky and having past work experience in the education field.

I first obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Saint Mary of the Woods College for the continuation of the presented study. After obtaining approval, I asked the sampled middle school administration to provide announcements and fliers to be hung around the school regarding advertising for the research project. Preceding hanging up the fliers in the school, I also requested the participating school system to provide a research announcement via email to all possible participants within the middle school district. All

emails and fliers had my contact information to sign up for the opportunity via phone or email. Later, I was allowed by the principal of the sampled middle school to come during a staff meeting one month before the study was conducted. I gave information pertaining to the study and delivered fliers with my contact information to interested participants. Interested participants were asked not to verbally agree to participate during the staff meeting, but rather contact me afterward to provide anonymity to potential participants. Participants were able to volunteer and participate in the study, but only 3-5 participants were chosen due to the volume of data that is analyzed independently by myself. Inclusion criteria for the participants included:

1. Must be in the age range from 21-62 years old.
2. Must be a qualified educator that can come to all 4 sessions of the study
3. Must be a qualified educator for over 1 school year.
4. Have no connection with the researcher in the past or present.

Once the participants volunteered and met inclusion criteria, an in-person meeting one week before the study was conducted to explain the different sets of consent forms (See Appendix A). Before the study began, participants had to sign consent agreements acknowledging the purpose of the study and to consent to audio recording for interviews during group discussion, the time needed for the study, examined potential risks, and were provided a list of support resources in the area to contact if the participant needed further assistance. I also emphasized to participants that they were able to drop out during the research process at any time without impacting their employment with the school.

Participants were given a confidentiality agreement to promise that personal information such as their name, school system, and individual responses remained confidential and be only in my possession (See Appendix A). Participants were also given audio and photography consent forms to allow group discussions to be audio recorded and transcribed by me, and to take photographs of individual and group images (See Appendix B). Participants were informed that personal information would be shredded after thematic analysis to protect the participants' identities. Participants were also informed audio recordings would be permanently deleted for anonymity after the publication of the thesis requirement (Pryzak and Bruce, 2016).

After participants reviewed and signed their consent agreements, I provided a list of potential risks involved in the study and reviewed these. A list of potential risks included: distress that may be found during reflective discussion of daily stressors of educators, distress by listening to other group members' experiences, and distress in communicating individual experiences in a group setting. Due to these potential risks, I gave a list of local resources to help them further with their negative symptoms if they needed additional assistance and support.

### **Research Design**

I and the participants held a short meeting one week before the study to discuss consent agreements, confidentiality, and the purpose of the overall study. The group of participants and myself met for one hour, once a week, for four weeks. Each session began in a designated conference room provided by the school that allowed enough space for adequate seating and the use of art mediums for art directives.

Each session followed the ongoing procedure: The researcher first organized and set out materials for each intervention thirty minutes prior to the session. Second, when participants arrived the researcher gave a five-minute overview of the group and art directive (see Appendix C). After the overview, the researcher gave participants 30 minutes to create an image in response to the given directive. The researcher noted in a field journal social interactions between participants. Once the 30 minutes ceased, the researcher conducted group discussion interviews based on the following guideline of open-ended interview questions (see Appendix D).

Each group session interview was audio recorded using the platform called Audacity, each discussion lasted for 20-30 minutes. After each participant was free to leave. The researcher then cleaned the designated area and materials after all participants left the research study room.

## **Data Collection**

### *Art Directives*

#### **Group Collage (Session 1)**

All directives in the current study had several types of art medium to elicit different components of the expressive therapies continuum (ETC). The first medium introduced with participants is group collage making (Hinz, 2009). According to Hinz (2009), collage making provided participants a gateway into creating art with less restiveness and hesitancy. Hinz (2009) states that collage materials can also provide reflective distance, and are easy materials introduced to participants for the first session.

The goal of using group collage making allowed participants to engage in ripping and pasting magazine clippings that can increase relaxation and is a part of the kinesthetic and

sensory component of the ETC (Hinz, 2009). However, the directive also provided a cognitive component of the ETC for the group in asking them what their goals as an educator are (Hinz, 2009). This allowed them to problem solve and provided reflection as to what images should be chosen to symbolize participants' goals (Hinz, 2009).

The group was asked to create a rip and paste collage using magazine clippings and glue that focused on cooperation and creating an image that represented their goals as an educator. Collage-making provided participants to create a connection between emotion and the asked event to allow the significance of the relationship (Mckay and Barton, 2018; Simmons and Dailey, 2013). Collage-making was introduced in the first session due to the reduced hesitancy of working with art materials that are experienced by many individuals. This provided participants to feel more comfortable while creating together (Hinz, 2009). The group collage directive also gave the opportunity of group connection to discuss their shared experiences of their overall goals as an educator with their colleagues and provided workplace social support that helped with burnout among middle school educators (Cobb, 1976; Merida-Lopez et al., 2020; Riley, 2001). This directive also provided the opportunity to be comfortable with expressing with the group participants and the researcher about experiences as a middle school educator (Hinz, 2009).

### **Teamwork Treasure Map (Session 2)**

This activity is based on the Hinz (2009) ETC cognitive activity "desert island." Participants in the group are to draw an "imaginary island treasure map" together. Participants were instructed to draw an island first with markers. Markers were chosen for the teamwork treasure map activity due to its resistive nature and does not elicit too much emotional reflection

in participants (Hinz, 2009). Markers were also chosen for the teamwork treasure map to allow participants to engage in the cognitive component of the ETC, and problem solve as a group and to provide reflective distance from the activity and be present in creating as a group (Hinz, 2009).

After completing the island drawing, I provided instructions to draw dotted lines to create a treasure map on the island. Following the drawing of the treasure map, the participants were instructed to pinpoint an X on the map to signify where the “buried treasure” is located on their map. For the last step, the researcher assigns each participant their own individual colored marker. I explained that each participant takes turns closing their eyes and another individual in the group is to try and direct them verbally to follow the dotted lines and reach the X on the map. I then allowed all participants to take turns closing their eyes and being led by another participant in the group.

This activity is based on the cognitive component of the ETC (Hinz, 2009). This experience allows the development of group connection and support from other colleagues and allows everyone to both demonstrate their individual input and shared experiences as a middle school educator. This activity allowed reflective distance between the thoughts of work relationships and can develop work-related support that has been stated previously to assist with burnout. This allowed participants to share more about their experiences as an educator with burnout with other educators and the researchers (Cobb, 1976; Hinz, 2009; Merida-Lopez et al., 2020).



### **Stress Management (Session 3)**

In this session, participants are asked to create an image about their stress at work using paper, acrylic paint, and paintbrushes (Potash et. al., 2016b). Paints as the medium allow the fluidity for participants provide an outlet for participants to explore their emotions, thoughts, and feelings attached to stress (Hinz, 2009). This utilizes the cognitive and affective components from the Expressive Therapies Continuum (Hinz, 2009). This activity elicits daily emotions and stressors that educators experience (Hinz, 2009).

### **Meaning Making (Session 4)**

The last session was composed of participants creating a group piece of what it means to be an educator (Potash et al., 2016b). The researcher gave the group participants with the following statement: “Today’s session will allow everyone in the group to create a poster together of what it means to them to be an educator. Please use poster paper, paints, and brushes to create a unity piece. After you are finished you can discuss the meaning of each part of the poster with participants in the group.” This session was made to connect the symbolic component and affective component of the Expressive Therapies Continuum to allow in depth reflection of the process and past experiences with participants and can elicit memory and emotion attached to the directive using a paint medium (Hinz,2009).

### ***Focus Group Discussion***

For the following study, the researcher developed an interview guide for the discussion group to use for each session. Discussion questions were adapted from Kavalieratos et al., (2017) interview guide for the use of burnout questions. The following interview guide is presented in Appendix D.

Artwork for the research was scanned in the researcher's home office and uploaded onto a flash drive on the researcher's laptop. After the images have been uploaded to the flash drive, the researcher permanently deleted the images for confidentiality (AATA, 2013). Artwork and the flash drive is stored with the researcher in their locked home office and held in a locked file cabinet (AATA, 2013). After the completion of the thesis requirement, the researcher provided an email or phone call to participants to discuss the relevant findings presented in the study. Following this, the researcher asked if they would like to receive the artwork they created for the study. If not, then the artwork is stored in a locked file cabinet and locked office for three years until it can be dismissed (AATA, 2013).

### **Data Analysis**

The current study used thematic analysis to collect data from the current study. The researcher noted in a field journal about individual interactions between participants during each art directive portion. Field note observations were placed in individually numbered folders that correlated to the participant number given to them at the beginning of the study. The field notes were placed in the correct folders at the end of each art directive. Group discussion comments were audio recorded using Audacity during group commentary. The audio recording of the group discussion was not thematically analyzed until the researcher returned to a private office located in their home to increase the accuracy of the transcription. After the completion of each session of the study, the artwork was collected after each session and placed in the correlating participant folder by the researcher.

The researcher after each session returned to their home office and listened to the corresponding audio recording and transcribed commentary into individual participants'

discussion. Individual discussion notes were placed in the folder numbers that were associated with field notes and artwork related to the participant.

The researcher then read everyone's individual folders. The researcher read and played the audio recording at the same time to better remember observed reactions or emotions attached to individual comments of participants (Terros, 2017). The researcher then re-read without the audio recording and read line by line to better analyze the information in the transcription. The researcher then underlined information related to the research question. Other commentaries such as burnout symptoms, burnout related to covid-19, challenges related to educators, and daily stressors were also underlined due to the relevance of the current middle school educator experience.

The researcher looked at everyone's underlined text in each session and then formulated groupings of common themes that were found within everyone's conversation in each session. After finding common themes in individuals' comments, themes between all participants would be observed as a group to better understand the overall themes of each art directive and session number.

Reported analysis was based on if two or more participants discuss similar themes in experience and shared in discussion (Fenner and Mohammad, 2019). This provides that members may have collective experience as being part of the group and being middle school educators. All themes found with 2 or more participants were then accumulated and presented in the current study's results.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results

In the presented qualitative study, I recruited 3 middle school educators ranging in from 3 years of teaching to 10 years of teaching middle school. With these participants, I utilized 4 group art directives followed by a group open-ended survey. Four themes resulted from the research with sub-themes (see table 1 in Appendix E). The four main themes include burnout, daily stressors, self-reflection, and group support.

#### **Burnout**

There was a common theme among middle educators when discussing burnout which related burnout symptoms to exhaustion. Secondly, discussed challenges due to the occurrence of Covid-19 affecting school systems. Lastly, they explored their experiences of being a new educator and how this could be interconnected with feeling professional burnout. It should be noted that all educators currently or in the past faced professional burnout.

#### ***Exhaustion***

Participant 1, a Caucasian male, third-year middle school educator, in response to being asked what burnout meant to them stated, “ Burnout? To me it means a lot of things. It’s an exhaustion. You are exhausted with lots of things. Burnout affects you to the point of when you get tired of everything.”

Similarly, when asked the same question participant 3, a Caucasian female, 2nd-year middle school educator responded, “I guess just being tired, exhausted, and having no passion, it’s just having to do it.” Related to exhaustion participant 2, a Caucasian female, 10-year middle

school educator further explored exhaustion and observed a lack of motivation derived from burnout. Participant 2 expressed their symptoms of burnout included, “lack of motivation. I mean, like lack of creativity, just not being as inspired to create and design.

### ***Covid-19 Challenges***

While exploring burnout, the presence of Covid-19 and its lasting impacts on educators were presented in conversation. Participant 2 voiced, “I think it’s kind of brought to light how much schools teach that’s not in the curriculum because now we are dealing with deficits of kids just being stuck at home for two years.” Additionally, participant 1 agreed with deficits that are being observed in the classroom by stating, “And this year coming in, we’ve had kids who they’re just so far behind. They have the bodies of 6<sup>th</sup> graders and have the knowledge base of 4<sup>th</sup> graders.” Covid-19 also presented other challenges such as building relationships with students. Participant 3 reported, “I don’t have a normal other than Covid. I guess, just building relationships because they are changing now since things are starting to be, normal I guess” in response to how Covid-19 has presented challenges for them in their education career.

### ***Being a New Educator during Covid-19***

While discussing burnout, participants 1 and 3, noted that they have been burnout during their first years of teaching due to both being a new teacher and learning how to overcome Covid-19 challenges. Participant 1 exclaimed:

So I have felt the burnout and I felt it every year the I’ve been teaching. I’ve been burned out because of Covid at the end of 2020. We were all done trying to figure it out. I was burned out moving into the next school year. We were still trying to just figure everything out and learn new ways of teaching...

### **Daily Stressors**

In every week's session, each educator was asked about the daily stressors that they encountered that day. There was a theme of both behavior management and an awareness of the lack of student motivation that often stressed them during their work week. Other noted stressors that did not happen to all participants were data collection in meetings, additional roles given to them outside of the classroom, observations by the administration, and being pink slipped from their job at the school.

### ***Behavior Management***

All educators that participated in the study faced daily stressors which often dealt with the behaviors of students. In the first week of the research session, Participant 2 stated, "I had some behavioral disruptions in one of my class periods. That was definitely a stressor because it did cause my other students to be distracted. And I don't like it when people interfere with other people's education."

This showcased the quality of education was being interfered by both stress of the educator as well as the control of the students. Participant 3 discussed more physical distractions such as, "It's getting these kids and them standing on my tables."

### ***Lack of Motivation from Students***

Another theme found to stress middle school educators was the lack of motivation of students observed in the classroom. Participant 1 discussed being stressed due to the end of school testing and its effects on the motivation of students by stated the following quote:

Pretty much same, kids have been testing past two and last week we took our biggest. The sixth grade was very confused, as to why they still had to be in a testing scenario, even though they didn't test yesterday or today. They were just kind of stuck in a room. And so by that time, we had some free time to work on anything they wanted to work on, kind of just hang out. By the time we were like, well, we need to focus. And it was hard to really draw their focus and get them to work. And then when my next group comes around, they really just didn't want to engage.

Participant 3 discussed a continuous lack of motivation within their related arts class, and that many students lack motivation due to their grade point average not being affected by failing related arts classes. Participant 3 explained:

And then seventh period came and some kids are just lazy and like are very openly lazy and I'm like, okay, so not a zero. Is that what you're telling me? Like, yeah. Like what am I supposed to do with that? Like, so that's just stressing. Like I don't know how to answer that anymore. Because they're just giving me the same answers every day about how they don't want to do it and how they don't care and how art is not important. And they don't have to have it to pass seventh grade.

Participant 2 explored due to them being a core content educator they were in charge of assisting the students in creating a writing portfolio for the end of the year. They stated the following quote their stress pertaining to students and testing:

Mainly students, making stuff harder than it has to be with their promotional portfolios. So working on those and like kids, like not wanting to do them or take them seriously, or they're just

in several different places and there's a lack of a sense of urgency. Like you have less than five weeks left now of middle school.

### **Self-Reflection**

Educators throughout the group art directive sessions found the benefit of self-reflection throughout the entirety of the process. During their times of self-reflection during the art making experience, educators explored the following subthemes: need for increased time for self, increased focus, personal symbolism found in the artwork, professional self-efficacy, stress relief, and mindfulness that was brought on by using art materials.

#### ***Increased time for self***

When asked how formal art therapy could support educators in session 3, participant 2 emphasized, "I think it gives them a time or reflection that people don't often get to do. Cause it stresses them out to even to take the time. But when you're like saying I have art therapy, you've designated that time." Similarly in session 3, participant 3, who is also an art teacher, stated, "I struggle even as a teacher to make art, just to do it, and make time." Participant 3 also states that oftentimes they create projects or demos for others, but often do not create things for themselves. Participant 2 in session 3 also acknowledged that art making can assist with burnout for educators due to designating a time for themselves. Participant 2 stated, "It forces kinda, we choose to go to art therapy, but you may say, oh, you're going to, but we choose it because at some point we do acknowledge that we need a breather but just taking this for ourselves..."

#### ***Focus***

Focus was discussed throughout different sessions in which they acknowledged art making as helping them with the focus of their professional goals and as a healthy distraction



from daily stressors. In session 1, participant 2 discussed creating a group collage about the “goals of an educator” that assisted them in refocusing on the positives of education (see Appendix F, Figure 1). Secondly, the art directive could assist other educators too. Participant 2 exclaimed, “It was able to help me to focus more on the positives, which just as a whole, helps with your attitude and mood.” Participant 2 also discussed the following quote in reference to the art directive and formal art therapy given to other art educators.:

I think it could be a stress reliever and something that can be a good refocusing of what our overall goal is. Sometimes when we get in the trenches, it’s hard to see the sunlight and this can be kind of like a way to start seeing the rays of sunshine come back in” in reference to the art directive and formal art therapy given to other educators.

Participant 1 in session 1 also found focus to be prominent in the art experience of group collage making. They found that the art experience allowed them to reorient their thoughts to the task itself and allow them to dig deeper in what their goals were as an educator. They voiced, “So working through it, as I mentioned earlier, I just had to keep focusing on myself. I really just tried to be sarcastic about it, I tried to more so focus on the task itself, and it really kind of helped me think about it a little more.” Participant 1 also communicated, “ at first I kept looking at it from a sarcastic viewpoint because that’s where I tend to go. But at the same time, it just allowed me to reorient my thoughts” when answering how art therapy could help educators with burnout.

### ***Personal Symbolism***

Educators found symbolism and the use of metaphor within their artwork during sessions 3 and 4 during the study. Participant 1 in response to their “daily stressors” in session 3 claimed

their second block being a “zoo” due their “wildness” and “disinterest” (Please see Figure 2 in Appendix F). Participant 1 exclaimed in their quote:

These are kids that they should be coming here and they're just now really learning what it means to be a middle-schooler and trying to get some normal but because of COVID they also just don't know. And so of my two blocks, this particular block, which I have which is the zoo, they are wild. Honestly, this is my third-year teaching. Of the time I've been teaching this is most disinterest ever come across.

Participant 2 in session 3 also found symbolism in their artwork pertaining to their “daily stressors”. They used both shape and color to demonstrate the ebb and flow of stress that they experienced during their day, and the continuous cycle that this has during the day (see Figure 3 in Appendix F). Participant 2 in answering the question “then what did you notice about your art itself or notice about the making or the process” the educator responded per the quote below:

Kind of made me reflect on how, for me, like I start, like blue is like a calmer color and then like a lot of times the stressors add on throughout the day, which is kind of like the whole, like it expands, but then like I get to go home to my family. So they had a bigger piece of paper. You would see it goes back to that because my family is kind of my center. So like, obviously the red is like the biggest stresses, but it's kind of like weaves in and out, like even like stressors that are the same. That's why I did like a light color and a dark color of color.

Some educators found “power” in visualizing their daily stressors and how it affected them on a day-to-day basis and being able to observe other stressors affecting educators.

Participant 3 created an image describing their daily stress as “I feel like there is a rain cloud on me” (see Figure 4 in Appendix F). Participant 3 stated per the quote below:

I like, it was hard getting to be fun to make stress. But I think it's beneficial. And now that I look at it, I can see that I feel this way every other day or every day, actual visual image here is like, I feel like a rain cloud on me, so I guess hitting the reality of it. Seeing all the other different stressors its very powerful.

In the last session of the study, participants 1 and 3 identified the “meaning of being an educator” through creating an image together of all the “hats a educator wears” (see Figure 5 in Appendix F). Participant 3 expressed, “I've worn a bunch of hats just even today and throughout past few weeks and the whole entire teaching experience. I've worn it more than five times each.” Each participant then went into the symbolism of each hat. Participant 3 exclaimed the following statements below:

So like I was saying about the graduation cap, I mean, we don't have to really put it at the top just because it's in that median while you're wearing these hats while also working on your own education in between all of the other hats that you have to do or wear. So it's not just the kids that I have education that they have to go through. You also do too, so that's important. And I like that you put the chef hat in there because I don't think about it that much, but I do buy snacks a lot for and I probably shouldn't because my paycheck is not allowing me to do that.

When asking Participant 3 if any of the other hats symbolized anything to them they responded with the quote below:

Definitely the top one. Whereas like an artist kind of had where teachers have to be creative, not just the art teacher and the math or the history teacher has to be creative at some point. And then the cowboy hat wrangling them in all the time, just classroom management can be kind of represented by the cowboy hat. The baseball hat, I was just thinking where we go to sporting events sometimes to go support the kids or we have to run down the hallway to go chase the kid. So there's my little like athletic part there because they're running away or doing something. They're not supposed to. And then bottom two here, just the colorful abstract hats, like how to represent any other little thing that you think of.

Participant 1 went into further exploration of what each “hat” symbolized to them as an educator. For them, each hat held significance to them in similar ways as participant 3. In exploring symbolism, the interviewer asked, “was there any symbolism with the hats that you drew or anything like that? Participant 1 replied with the following quote below to the question:

So I mean the few ideas that I had off the top of my head, the cowboy hat, I guess we're always having to wrangle some of our more rougher classes. The graduation cap because we teachers are still learning about things and there's always new methods or having to go back and get another certification to keep your license or if you want to make more money, you need another certification. And of course the chefs hat because we feed kids. Whether we feed them with actual food or we feed them other ways, we feed them. I went in as we were discussing things and I added on, because I had two plain hats and I'm like, well I wanted one non-descript hat, just kind of, shoe fit situation.

But the other hat was we're therapist unofficially to some of these kids. They'll come, especially like if they like you they'll come and they'll open up to you about things that are going on. And of course you gotta turn around and tell somebody it's like, yeah, gotta talk. I fully agree with the painters cap, we have to be creative. You can't do the exact same lesson structure every single day because you won't make it a quarter of the way into the year before the kids are bored and not, they just don't want to be involved. And then the sports cap, we are literal or figurative coaches, and sometimes we are running marathons of our own throughout the day of just go, go, go, go, go, go.

### *Professional Self-efficacy*

Self-efficacy, or the belief in the ability to complete a work-related task, was referenced by educators in the study. 2 educators referenced their self-efficacy in the study, these were participants 1 and 3. Both participants held negative self-efficacy towards their profession as an educator. As stated previously, negative self-efficacy can relate to an increase in burnout symptoms (Hilger et al., 2020). Both participants stated that each is experiencing burnout symptoms currently. Participant 3 in session 3 stated, "I am not good enough" in relation to their classroom management and that increases their daily stress. Participant 1 in the last session declared being pink-slipped from the school. Due to this incident, the educator witnessed an increase in negative self-efficacy and exclaimed this comment below:

So, I just had to think about this, especially with my last group, was like, this group is pretty much the reason why my behavior management was just not fitting for the school and how I'm not connecting with my students and families is just not fitting for this school.

### *Stress Relief*

Throughout the study, participants reported that art directives and art therapy, in general, could provide other educators with burnout stress relief from their day to day duties. Participants also witnessed stress relief through art making. Stress relief was acknowledged by the following categories: mindfulness practices, increase in fun and enjoyment, the ability for reflection, and having an outlet for communicating professional stresses.

In session 1 (see figure 1 in appendix F), participants 1 and 2 were asked the following question after creating a collage of the “goals of being an educator”:

*And then how did you think art experience such as this one or formal art therapy might support educators?*

Participant 2 responded per the quote below:

I think it could definitely be a stress reliever and something that can be a good refocusing of what our overall goal is. Sometimes when we get in like the trenches, it's hard to see the sunlight and this can be a kind of like a way to start seeing the rays of the sunshine come back in.

When asked the same question, participant 1 also acknowledged how art therapy practices by providing an outlet of communication to de-stress and provide reflection. Participant 1 exclaimed per the quote below:

It's definitely an outlet. We tend to just work, work, work, work, work, and don't ever take the time to stop and process things like this. So having an outlet like that, even if it's like, Hey, you're going to go do an art therapy session. Like we're recommending that you go do this.”

In session 2, educators were asked to make a collaborative treasure map. After their creation, they were then asked to lead other participants blindly in finding “treasure” on the map (see Figure 6 in Appendix F). When asked, “What did you take away from this art experience today”, participant 2 reflected with the following quote below:

That it was good to laugh and giggle about things because I mean, this is just a simple thing to do, but our lives are usually very, very complicated. It's very complicated. So just doing some simple kind of things gives you kind of a release.

In reference to the same question, participant 1 found both joy and mindfulness practices within the session. Participant 1 stated:

That sometimes you just kind of give yourself over to an experience, that you can't always control every little aspect, especially when it comes to blindly leading or blindly following others. Sometimes could a good thing. Sometimes could be a bad thing. Sometimes it could be a funny thing.

Participant 1 also reflected on how this intervention could be useful with other educators by stating the following:

Just thinking about it allows me to, because I know that I can't always control every little thing even in my own classroom. And so that tends to stress me out. But having this as a, well, you're not always going to be able to control everything but sometimes there is a reward.

Participant 3 also found stress relief in session 4. In session 4, participant 3 found creating all “the hats” that an educator wears to be beneficial by being able to enjoy the reflection process. In response to how art therapy could assist educators, Participant 3 stated,

“Just being able to sit down and reflect on what's it like to be a teacher and doing it in an expressive and fun way because I love to paint, so I won't complain about it.” In addition to this statement, participant 3 also added this comment in reference to how art therapy could assist with educator burnout, “Again, just setting out time for themselves to again, reflect and just have some free time to paint. It's good to just relax and enjoy the moment.”

### **Group Support**

Group support was acknowledged as a theme during the stages of research due to the occurrence of educators witnessing different perspectives and enjoying the presence of educators. Differing perspectives allowed educators to observe differences in perspectives and narratives of being an educator and it highlighted those different perspectives can bring forth strengths. Being a part of a group allowed the increase in teamwork and provided a supportive environment for educators to explore art directives.

### ***Different Perspectives***

Participant 1 highlighted difference of perspectives in both session 1 and 3. In session 1, participant 1 focused on the differing perspectives and how this was showcased on their goals of an educator collage (see figure 1 in appendix F). When asked, “how is it working with another educator today”, participant 1 responded with the quote below:

Working along with others, you realize that, nobody works exactly the same as you. You can come together and just start putting these things together. You can see a different perspectives and get a different idea. She wanted to stay completely, stay more positive about things and all of that, just trying to remind herself. And I see that and I see the positivity and at the same time I'm



over here, I'm like, well, I'm like, again, not being a sarcastic, but still just trying to keep my thoughts to really what I think. Try to be authentic about it.

Similarly in session 3, participant 1 acknowledged differing ideas and thoughts in regard to daily stressors educators witness (see figures 2-4 in Appendix F). Participant 1 exclaimed, “We're all just so focused. And so it's always interesting to see how each of us deal with these experiences, not just deal with it but go through these experiences.”

Participant 2 highlighted that different perspectives could be seen as strengths amongst educators and that the session provided insight into the different stressors of educators. In session 3, when asked , “how was it working with other educators”, and “what was the biggest takeaway from this experience”, participant 2 responded with these quotes:

Well, personally, I don't know. It made me think outside the box, like visualizing stress and kind of as a group, how different we all like did it. So it was like very different.

I think the most important thing was, I like seeing our different styles of how we represented stress. And I also liked thinking about how our differences really are our strengths, a lot of the time.

### ***Being a Part of a Group***

The support of being amongst other educators was noted by participants during the group art making process. When asked, “discuss what was most important to you today”, participant 3 provided the following feedback during session 3

I think being with other teachers, because I find myself in my classroom and I don't see anybody else but students all day. And so like, I think it was very beneficial to do art with other teachers. And it is relaxing.

Similarly, participant 1 and 2 found it beneficial doing groupwork with other educators, and being able to work cohesively in the art making process. Participant 1, in session 2, commented the following statement in regards to working with another educator:

Well, working with another educator on this instead of just having to focus on, talking about teaching and all the data, our usual meetings, it's always a relief. And I mean, we still had something to do, so we weren't just sitting here turning inwards and just bitching, like we may sometimes do during lunch. And so it was definitely a different outlet and allowed us to just enjoy the moment.

Participant 2 also reflected on their groupwork in session 2. Participant 2 identified, "That, it's nice to just like sometimes I come together and work in a group and not be about like data." Additionally, they stated, "I guess the most important thing was that we're never too old. I mean, like going back to a theme, like of like we're never too old to listen to each other and like just how we describe things and it's just really interesting."

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion

#### Restatement of Purpose

This qualitative study used group-based art directives and semi-structured interview questions to provide a thematic analysis to showcase the experiences of middle school educator burnout in the central Kentucky region. The study also provided insight on how art therapy could potentially be beneficial for educators and provide support in the education system. The research question used for the following study was: What are the experiences of using art with middle school educators? To answer this question, 3 middle school educators took part in group, 1-hour sessions, creating art based on directives created based on the perceived workplace social support theory. Group interview questions were conducted after each of the four sessions in which were analyzed to provide presenting themes.

#### Discussion

Through this qualitative study, four main themes each holding subthemes were found in focus group interview questions. The four main themes include: (a) burnout described by the subthemes of exhaustion, being a new educator, and an educator in Covid-19, (b) daily stressors and the provided subthemes of behavior management and lack of respect from students, (c) self-reflection narrated through sub-thematic commentary on increased time for self, focus, personal symbolism, professional self-efficacy, and stress relief, (d) and group support that showcased the subthemes of different perspectives and being a part of a group.

Due to the quotes provided by participants regarding art interventions, there are a few things that can be concluded. First, art interventions that were introduced were a beneficial experience for middle school educators allowing them a safe place for self-expression and providing another form of communication for educators to explore. Secondly, art interventions were created based on workplace social support theory, this fostered group connection through both group artmaking and being in the presence of other educators which can help diminish symptoms of burnout (Chenting et al., 2015). Educators also voiced their support and the potential of art making in assisting educators with burnout and daily stressors. This was emphasized that it could be achieved through self-reflection during the art-making process that was experienced by educators in the study.

### **Limitations**

Even though there are many strengths to the provided study, there are also many limitations. The first limitation that can be noted is the sample size. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the number of participants for the study does not follow the guidelines of sample size for this study. This in turn can affect the applicability of the research given to later populations of educators.

Another limitation is sampling collected from a town public school community of middle school educators. Due to sampling being narrowed specifically to town public middle school teachers, the experiences and directives of this study may not apply to other middle school educators in suburban and urban communities due to different demographics, resources, and overall experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The sampling of middle school educators also may not be applied to all different levels of educators. Different levels of educators may have

different needs and support with art that may not be found in this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The majority of middle school educator participants in this study also were unable to attend all 4 sessions of the study. Participant 1 was the only participant that attended all session of the study, participant 2 attended 3 sessions, and participant 3 could only attend 2 sessions. This could have limited the accuracy of resulting themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This demonstrates a further need to explore themes regarding educators and art therapy and how its effectiveness with the United States educator population.

Lastly, middle school educators in this study discussed openly with other educators and the researcher about their experiences of burnout. There is a likelihood of educators inaccurately portraying their experience of burnout symptoms and willingness to share personal experiences due to colleagues in the workplace being present during sessions of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Ethical Implications**

Noting ethical implications can help future research procedures and planning in art therapy qualitative research (Betts and Deaver, 2016). In this study the limited number of participants can contribute to lacking rich data and variability (Pyrzak and Bruce, 2017). Another ethical implication is due to participants willing to volunteer for the study, the participants could know one another. Furthermore, it can provide an opportunity to disclose information outside of the study (Code 2.2, AATA, 2013). This should be acknowledged and put in the confidentiality agreement for participants not to breach confidentiality and information not to be disclosed outside of the study (AATA, 2013). Another ethical implication is that some participants may

have worked with myself in the past. Consequently, it is an ethical issue due to code 6.6 of the AATA (2013), therefore it was taken into consideration when reviewing the volunteer applicants for no participant having worked with me.(AATA, 2013).

### **Research Bias**

Because of my experience with art, there is already a pre-determined belief in the healing power of art. Due to the conceived notion that “art helps” (Gantt and Goodman, 1997) and personal experiences with rehabilitating forces art can provide, it can be detrimental to the observation of data and group art therapy discussion (AATA, 2013). Therefore, I remained observant and obtained data from individual educator experiences that are shared. Another research bias that could be presented is I had been in the education system around the same sampling district. Therefore, participants may know of myself and may be influenced to support the research being conducted (AATA, 2013). For this not to happen, the researcher chose participants that did not have a connection with the researcher in the past or present to limit biases (AATA, 2013).

### **Future Studies**

As stated previously, there were many limitations because of the sampling conducted for the present study. Future researchers should consider collecting large sample sizes to increase the overall knowledge of how art can assist middle school educators (Creswell, 2018). With the current research providing only the beginning into researching educators with burnout with group art directives, it should also be explored with different levels of educators to see if art can support all levels of educators and what art provides for them. Future research should also investigate if group art directives can help support ethnically diverse educator populations within

the United States as well as around the globe. This would provide rich data on the differences in needs of each group of educators based on culture, demographic, ethnicity, and gender. This in turn will continue to expand on the qualitative data with educators (Creswell, 2018).

Due to the research on art therapy used with educators being new, there is a whole host of opportunities for future research that is related to art therapy and the educator field. Most art therapy research with educators focuses on educator burnout and self-reflection using individual art therapy directives (McKay and Barton (2018)). However, research amongst art therapy and educators has not explored the teacher and student relationship. This intervention could possibly decrease burnout significantly due to most of the interaction an educator receives is from their students rather than support from colleagues which was utilized in this study (Bottani et al., 2019).

## **Conclusion**

This study was created due to my experiences as an educator during the Covid-19 pandemic, and my and other colleagues' challenges that cultivated burnout symptoms. Due to this study, I can now see the importance of readily providing art therapy to school administrations, educators, and students at each school system in central Kentucky. Providing directives for a group of middle school educators allowed insight into the experiences of educators, the benefits of art with middle school educators, and the support that can be promoted using group artmaking and workplace social support. I hope this research can be the starting point for future art therapists to explore the importance of art therapy within the school system and educator burnout.

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## **Appendix A: Participant Consent and Confidentiality Agreement Forms**

### **Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Title of the Research Study: Experiences of using art with middle school educators to examine burnout during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Principal Investigator: Keturah Welton, Ph.D, ATR-BC. LPC Co-investigator: Danielle Creamer, BA

You are being asked to participate in a research study to explore experiences of using art with middle school educators to examine burnout. Key information for you to consider is provided below. Please carefully consider this key information and read this entire form to obtain more detailed information about this research study. Please feel free to ask questions about any of the information before deciding whether to participate in this research project. Participating in this research project is voluntary.

#### Key Information

- Purpose of the research study

: This study is to increase the literature of art therapy to diverse populations such as educators in public school systems. This study hopes to provide a better understanding of how art can support middle school teachers and the education system, and to provide insight from images and discussion on how burnout has affected the lives of educators in the present. Lastly, the study aims to bring forth thematic data to increase the awareness of art therapy effectiveness for middle school educators and within the school communities using group art directives in the study.

- Procedure and Duration

: You will be asked to come to session at 3:50 PM after school in designated room that will be provided by the researcher. The researcher will then provide a 5-minute overview of the art directive for the session. Teachers will then be allotted 40 minutes to create a image in response to the directive given by the researcher. After creating the response, educators will then have group discussion with the researcher for 20 minutes pertaining to the directive and burnout. This will take approximately take an hour and 10 minutes once a week on Wednesday, for four weeks.

- Risks and discomfort

: Risks or discomforts from this research study include: limit in confidentiality due to group discussion, distress in discussing experiences of being an educator, distress by listening to others educator experiences that may elicit negative emotions and becoming uncomfortable talking in front of colleagues. Due to potential risk and discomfort the researcher is obligated to provide a local resource list that you can use at your discretion if you need further assistance with prolonging negative thought or experiences from the research. Secondly, although I will make

every effort as a researcher to protect their confidentiality, including stressing to all group members the importance of not discussing group discussions outside of the group. However, all participants must be aware that I cannot guarantee that other group members will respect this request. Lastly, participants may feel coerced to participate in the study. However, they will be reminded they have continual access to other services in the school system such as counseling by the school counselor, weekly/monthly educator training and group sessions, and after school tutoring or clubs' teachers volunteer for. Therefore, it limits coercion to participate in the study.

- **Potential benefits**

Benefits that may be expected from this research study include finding comfort in other colleague's similar experiences, creating a support system in the workplace, observing art's benefit in processing daily experiences as an educator and with burnout, and the benefit of discussing stressors with others.

- Participation is voluntary, and you are welcome to leave the study at any point without affecting employment status.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of the research study is to increase the literature of art therapy to diverse populations such as educators in public school systems. This study hopes to provide a better understanding of how art can support middle school teachers and the education system, and to provide insight from images and discussion on how burnout has affected the lives of educators in the present. Lastly, the study aims to bring forth thematic data to increase the awareness of art therapy effectiveness for middle school educators and within the school communities through the use of group art directives in the study.

You are being asked to participate because you qualify as a participant by: being a middle school educator, being a qualified teacher for at least one year being in age range of 21-62 years old, and having no affiliation with the researcher outside of the study.

### **Procedures**

The researcher and the participants will have a short meeting a week before the study to discuss consent agreements, confidentiality, and the purpose of the overall study. If the participants continue to move forward with the study, the group of participants and the researcher will meet one hour and 10 minutes, once a week, for 4 weeks. Each session will begin at 3:50pm in a designated room provided by the school with future approval granted.

Each session will follow the ongoing procedure: First the researcher will organize and set out materials for each intervention thirty minutes prior to the meeting. Second, when participants have arrived the researcher will give a five-minute overview of the group and art directive. After the overview, the researcher will give participants 30 minutes to create in response to the given

directive. The researcher will note in a field journal of social interaction between participants. Once the 30 minutes has ceased, the researcher will conduct group discussion interviews on the process creating, stress levels, burnout, and thoughts of education in the pandemic which will also be written in the field journal. The focus group interview will last for 20 minutes each session, and after each participant is free to leave. The researcher will then clean the designated area and materials after all participants have left.

### **Risks or Discomforts**

Some potential risks or discomforts that can be:

- distress in discussing experiences of being an educator
- distress by listening to others educator experiences that may elicit negative emotions
- becoming uncomfortable talking in front of colleagues.
- limitation of confidentiality due to group discussion directives
- possible coercion to participate in the study

Due possible risks, the co-researcher is obligated to provide you a list of local resource such as counseling centers and other mental health services. The researcher will also provide a comforting environment to limit possible stressors. Secondly, each participant will answer the same interview question each time to limit potential uncomfortableness. Next, although I will make every effort as a researcher to protect confidentiality, including stressing the importance of not discussing group discussions outside of the group. However, all participants must be aware that it cannot be guaranteed that other group members will respect the request given by the researcher. Lastly, educators will be reminded of continual access to services of counseling by the school counselor, education weekly/monthly training and group sessions, and after school tutoring or clubs' teachers volunteer for including art group. Therefore, it limits coercion to participate in the study due to other activities within the school community.

### **Potential Benefits**

Potential benefits from the study are:

- Time to reflect on daily stressors in an education environment
- Finding comfort in other colleague's similar experiences
- Observe benefits of using art with educators through expressed discussion
- Finding comfort in other colleague's similar experiences
- Creating a potential support system in the workplace.
- Potential observation of the benefits of art with burnout symptoms

- Potential observation of art directives allowing reflection and processing daily events as an educator
- The benefit of discussing stressors with others.

### **Confidentiality**

During discussion in each session, participants will be audio recorded with consent of the participants and be transcribed verbatim by the co-investigator. There will be a confidentiality agreement to promise that personal information such as their name, school system, and individual responses will remain confidential and be only in the possession of the researchers. The researcher will discuss with clients that confidentiality will be limited due to the group setting. The researcher will emphasize the importance of not breaching confidentiality by not discussing the study and group outside of the research and take self-responsibility not disclosing personal or group information to other colleagues or administration. However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed and is limited due to members potentially not respecting the request of the researcher.

After the study is conducted and analysis is complete personal information obtained in the field journal will be shredded to protect the participants' identities as well audio recordings will be permanently deleted for anonymity.

Artwork for the research will be scanned in the researcher's home office and uploaded onto a flash drive on the researcher's laptop. After the images have been uploaded to the flash drive, the researcher will permanently delete the images for confidentiality. Artwork and the flash drive will be stored with the researcher in their locked home office and held in a locked in a file cabinet. The artwork and the flash drive will be stored for three years while the researcher collects data and has the final product for their thesis presentation. After this allotment of time, the researcher will contact participants to see if they would like to be given their individual artwork back or for it to be disposed. The images on the flash drive will also be deleted for confidentiality of the participants.

Any of your information that can directly identify you will be stored separately from the data that will be maintained for a period of three years in a locked file cabinet and in a locked room. However, all participants will assign a number for their discussion questions and artwork to further anonymity.

### **Voluntary Participation**

It is entirely voluntary to participate in this research study. You can initially refuse participation in the study by not signing the consent form or withdraw from the study at any time without affecting your employment. You can contact the co-investigator, Danielle Creamer, [danielle.creamer@smwc.edu](mailto:danielle.creamer@smwc.edu) or at 859-576-7649 even if you decide to be part of the study now.



**Use of Data for Future Study**

Data that does not contain information directly identifying you could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent.

If you have questions about this research study, please contact the principal investigator or co-investigator.

Principal Investigator: Keturah Welton, Ph.d, ATR-BC, LPC

Keturah.welton@smwc.edu

Co-investigator:

Danielle Creamer, BA

[Danielle.creamer@smwc.edu](mailto:Danielle.creamer@smwc.edu)

Phone: 859-576-7649

This study was approved by the Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

Chair, IRB.

Dr. Lamprini Pantazi, Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College

Saint Mary of the Woods, IN 47876 (812) 535-5232

lpantazi@smwc.edu

My signature below indicates that I am 18 years of age or older, I have been informed about this study, I consent to participate, and I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature

Date

*Note: If participant is under the age of 18, participant's parent or guardian must sign the consent form and the participant must sign an assent form.*

## Appendix B: Participant Consent to Photograph and Audiotape Form

### Saint Mary-of-the- Woods CollegeMedia Consent Form

#### CONSENT TO PHOTOGRAPH/AUDIOTAPE

Thank you for your participation in this research project. As part of this project, you may choose to be photographed, videotaped, and/or audio taped. Please indicate below the use of the media to which you are willing to consent by placing your initials in the blank in front of the item.

Initial the item that best suits your level of comfort. There will be no negative consequences for refusing to be photographed, videotaped, and/or audio taped. The results of this study may be presented in educational settings, scientific journals, popular press or newspapers, professional conferences, or the media. The researcher agrees to only use the materials in ways to which you agree. Pseudonyms will be used in presenting this research. Only one group participant will be permitted in the room at the time of the recording. Each individual will have ten minutes to themselves to create their recording.

	<u>Please initial</u>
I give approval for my artwork to be photographed for each intervention.	Yes: _____ or
No _____	
I give approval for my interview to be individually recorded for transcript after the last session.	Yes: _____ or No _____
I give approval for my voice to be heard on tape after the last session.	Yes: _____ or
No _____	

I understand that I can withdraw my permission to be photographed, videotaped, and/or audio taped at any time without prejudice and with no explanation required

I have read the above and give my consent for the use of the photograph/videotaped/audiotape as indicated. I certify that I am eighteen (18) years of age or older and that I have been given a copy of this form for my own records.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Appendix C: Group Art Directives and Process**

Before the beginning of group, the researcher will have a discussion with participants about the purpose of the overall group as well as the difference between art therapy and the present study using art directives. This is what the researcher will present to the participants in the beginning of session one:

“Hello everyone. The purpose of the present study is to examine how art can assist educators with burnout. This study is to increase the literature of art therapy to diverse populations such as educators in public school systems. This study hopes to provide a better understanding of how art can support middle school educators and the education system, and to provide insight from images and discussion on how burnout has affected the lives of educators in the present. Lastly, the study aims to bring forth thematic data to increase the awareness of art therapy effectiveness for middle school educators and within the school communities using group art directives in the study. For this study, we are not using art therapy interventions.

Art therapy is a mental health service that derives from psychological theories and combines the creative process of visual arts to promote physical, mental, social, and emotional growth. Art therapy can be used with a wide array of age groups and can be adjusted to meet the needs of each individuals’ goals. Art therapy interventions are given by a licensed art therapist, as well are designed to help an individual or group with specific treatment and possible diagnoses. In the present study, we are only examining the use of art and how it can assist educators experience with burnout and daily stressors of the occupation. There will be no designed treatment for the group and only be interview based of your experience as an educator with designed art directives.

#### **Group Directive 1: Group Collage Making**

Explanation of group directive to participants: “Today we will be creating a group collage about the goals of being an educator. You are given magazine clippings, glue, and poster paper to create your group collage. Please rip and paste the magazine clippings that you will use for the collage. You will be given 40 minutes to create your group collage and we will follow with 20-minute discussion about the group directive.”

After participants create for 40 minutes, the researcher will provide the interview discussion questions for the first meeting and additional questions and this will last for 20 minutes. The researcher will then clean up after participants have left the study room.

#### **Group Directive 2: Teamwork Treasure Map**

Participants in the group are to draw an “imaginary island treasure map” together. The researcher will explain the following to participants: “Today you are instructed to draw an island together as a group using markers and this presented poster paper. After, you have completed the group drawing of the island you are then to draw dotted lines to create a treasure map on the island image. After you are done creating the map, participant must pinpoint an X on the map to signify where the “buried treasure” is located on your map.” For the last step, the researcher assigns each participant their own individual colored marker. The researcher will explain the next step by stating the following: “Each participant now has their own individual color marker. I

would now like that each participant to take turns closing their eyes and another individual in the group is to try and direct them verbally to follow the dotted lines and reach the X on the map. All participants are to have one turn closing their eyes and being led by another participant in the group.”

After participants create for 40 minutes, the researcher will provide the interview discussion questions designated for all group meetings and this will last for 20 minutes. The researcher will then clean up after participants have left the study room.

### **Group Directive 3: Stress Management**

The following group directive will be presented to participants as followed: “Today we each person is creating an image of what their daily stress looks like with acrylic paint, paper, and brushes as materials. You will have 40 minutes to create your image and it will be followed by discussion in the end.”

After participants create for 40 minutes, the researcher will provide the interview discussion questions designated for all group meetings and this will last for 20 minutes. The researcher will then clean up after participants have left the study room.

### **Group Directive 4: Meaning making**

In the last session, participants will be given the following directions: “Today we are creating a group image of what it means to be an educator. You will have acrylic paint, brushes, and poster paper to create a group image together to express the meaning of being an educator. You will be given 40 minutes to create the image and it will be followed by our last discussion in the study. “

After participants create for 40 minutes, the researcher will provide the interview discussion questions designated for all meetings and closure questions on the survey question list, and this will last for 20 minutes. After the 20 minutes the researcher will thank the participants for their willingness to endure the study, and when results are finalized, they will be provided a debriefing phone call or email. The researcher will then clean up after participants have left the study room.

## Appendix D: Group Discussion Interview Questions

### Focus Group Interview Guide

1. (Question only asked in the first session): How long you have been an educator and how long have you been in this school system?
2. (Question only in the first session) How has covid impacted you as an educator? What were the main challenges attributed to COVID-19 that are still prevalent today?
3. (Question for the first session) What does burnout mean to you?
4. (Question for the first session) Have you experienced burnout recently? When did you observe your symptoms and what were they? What do you think may have caused your burnout?

The rest of the questions will be asked each time for the session:

5. What are some daily stressors that you have experienced today?
6. What did you take away from this art experience today?
7. What did you learn about yourself today?
8. What did you take away from working with other educators today?
9. How do you think art experiences such as this or formal art therapy might support educators?
10. How can art therapy support educators with burnout?
11. . Of all the things we have discussed today, what to you is the most important? a. What questions would you have asked if you were me? What have I missed?
12. (Question for only last session): Reflecting on our first week together, until now what is the most important takeaway from this experience? Is there anything you learned? If so, what is it?

**APPENDIX E: Table Demonstrating Themes and Sub Themes**

Themes	Sub-Themes
Burnout	Exhaustion Covid-19 Challenges Being a New Educator during Covid-19
Daily Stressors	Behavior Management Lack of Motivation from Students
Self-Reflection	Increased Time for Self Focus Personal Symbolism Professional Self-Efficacy Stress Relief
Group Support	Different Perspectives Being a Part of a Group

**APPENDIX F: Group Artwork made by Participants**



*Figure 1: Session 1 group collage of “Goals of an Educator”*



*Figure 2: The Zoo, Participant 1 response to session 3*



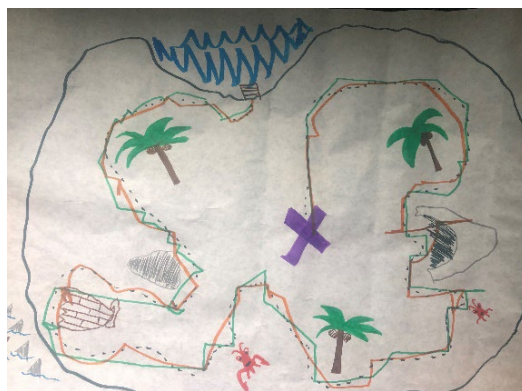
**Figure 3:** Daily Stressors, Participant 2 response to session 3



**Figure 4:** Daily Stressors, Participant 3 response to session 3



**Figure 5:** Wearing a lot of hats, Participant 1 and 3 response to session 4



**Figure 6:** Session 2 Groupwork Treasure Map, participants 1 and 2