

Nurture A.R.T. Self
Adolescents Mental Health &
Art Therapy Conference
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Art as a language for children suffering from family violence

Prof. Sophia Law
Associate professor
Department of Visual Studies
Lingnan University

Seeing comes before words



John Berger (2008) *Ways of Seeing*

Experience of our VISUAL

Survival

Personality development

*cognitive ability
emotional needs
memories*

Perception of self and the reality



Art - image writing



it applies to all – ages, intellectual abilities, literate/illiterate

Art as a language for children suffering from family violence

Why art

Practices and theory of art therapy

other hypotheses

supportive theories

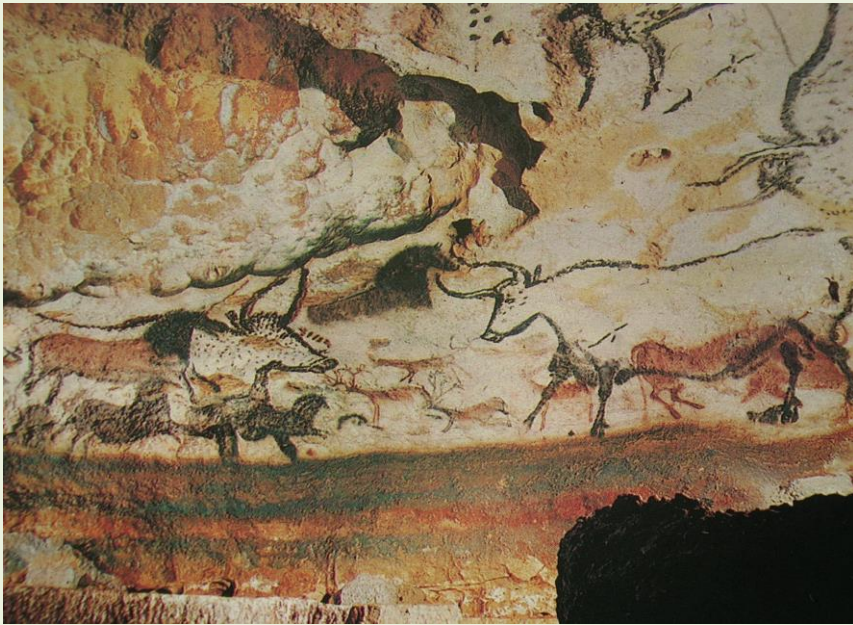
Clinical findings

The project

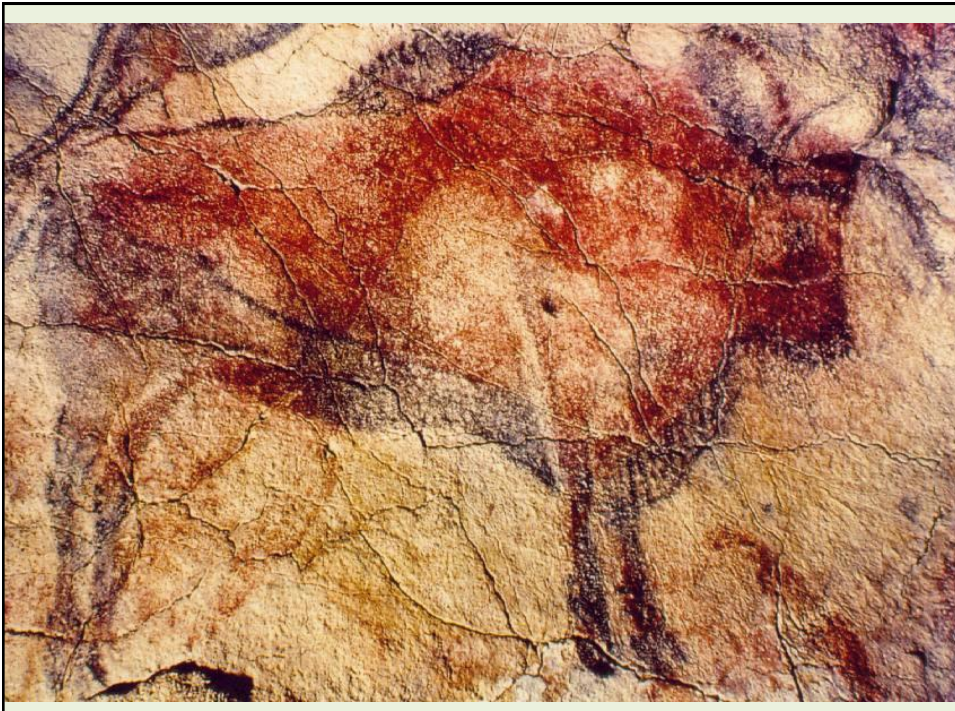
Why art

Art – a language written in images

- biological origin (anthropology)
- cognition and vision (neurosciences)
- symbolism and aesthetics (philosophy of art)
- art as expression and exploration (cognitive psychology)
- memories and trauma studies
- art making as an affirming experience (art therapy)



Hall of the Bulls, Paleolithic c. 15,000-13,000BC cave painting, Lascaux



Art and evolution



*hands eyes
co-ordinations*



Biological Nature of Art

art evolved as play

*exploratory
external world
social bonding*

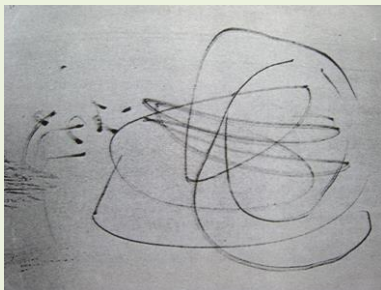


creativity

make 'real'
imagination



social communication
exploration of the environment
exploration of inner self



symbolism



The Visual: Modern Brain Science

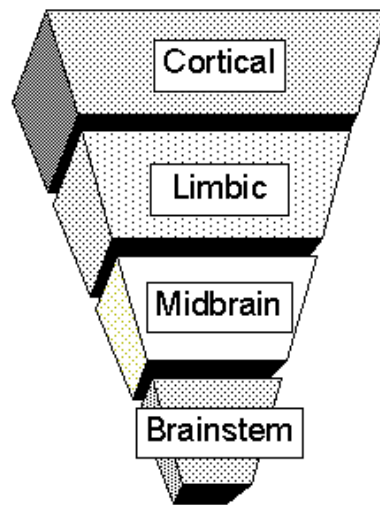
- exact location and the mechanism of how we process our visual information
- more brain neurons are devoted to vision than to any other of our senses
- among the five senses, **vision is possibly the most complex and richest**
- three basic intelligences: visual, rational and emotional
- **visual intelligence** is a more complex process

Cognitive memories – senses and language

- learning through senses (visual is the most complex)
- visual centre and language centre (brain science)
- iconic communication serves functions that are different from those of language

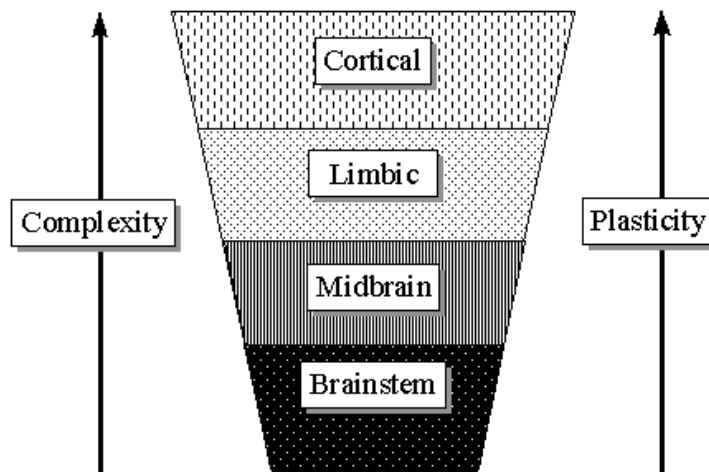
Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (London: Paludin, 1973)

Art – about senses



Abstract Thought
Concrete Thought
Affiliation
Attachment
Sexual Behavior
Emotional Reactivity
Motor Regulation
"Arousal"
Appetite/Satiety
Sleep
Blood Pressure
Heart Rate
Body Temperature

Hierarchy of brain function (Bruce D. Perry, *Memories of Fear*, 1999)



Plasticity and brain organization (Bruce D. Perry, *Memories of Fear*, 1999)

Brain Development

The prime 'directive' of the human brain is to **promote survival**.

Therefore, the brain is 'over-determined' to sense, process, store, perceive and mobilize in response to threatening information from the external and internal environments (Goldstein, 1995).

Childhood trauma

Cognitive psychology and the visual

"Thinking calls for images, and images contain thought. Therefore, the visual arts are a homeground of visual thinking."

Arnheim, Rudolf, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), p.254.

Cognitive Psychology

- visual works before language
- human thinking takes a pictorial form
- memories are stored in images
- unconscious mind/ hidden memories

Intrinsic nature of art

- art: a language written in images
- for expression and communication
- art making: visual thinking
- art making: senses rather than intellectual ability
- a language particularly useful for those with difficulty in articulation with words

Trauma

- an overwhelming experience of a catastrophic event
- so sudden that immediate response to the event is impossible
- non-fully processed emotions
- delayed response: repetitive, intrusive
- undesirable emotions: fear, angst, guilt, anxiety, sadness
- can be pathological: melancholy and depression

In cases of trauma, language often fails.

Child victims of trauma

- language skill
- situations too complicated to understand
- cognitive and psychological development
- very confused emotions/values
- can be pathological: personality, mental health

For young child victims, language has great limitation.

Memory coding

2 forms of coding and decoding

- *primitive* (visually-based, an event as a whole in its exact details)
- *constructive* nature (hierarchical system of constituent parts)
- our memories can be distorted, forgotten, hidden with or without our awareness

Trauma and Latent Memory

defense mechanism:

- stress hormone: inhibit/damage our hippocampus
- fragmented/hidden memory
- embedded in our unconscious and does not integrate with other conceptual memories (the limbic system)

latent memories:

- difficult to access
- strong sensorimotor and highly visual qualities
- non-verbal means: drawing

When language fails, art making serves to articulate feelings and thoughts

"These acts of creating images pierced small holes in my sense of isolation. The joy I once had in spoken language, the release in confiding and sharing, the pleasure in intellectual exchanges with others, might now have other expressions, however inchoate and primitive.

If I could not speak what I felt, I would draw and write it."

Claudia L. Osborn, Over My Head: A Doctor's Own Story of Head Injury from Inside Looking Out (Kansas: Andrews McMeel, 1998)

Art Making

- image making
- visual thinking
- different from verbal presentation (language structure)
- iconic presentation/communication
- less structure
- spontaneous



Art Making

- sensory experiences
- richness of texture
- colours, forms
- exploring, articulation
- problem solving
- self identification



Artistic creativity and learning

- a greater awareness of the external world
- an access to inner emotions
- development of concepts through visual forms
- abstract thinking
- organizing, composing, configuring, abstracting



Creativities

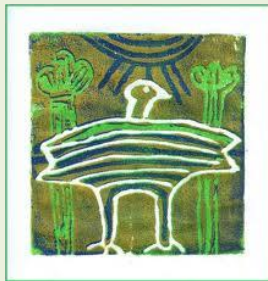
engage
self-directed
joy
satisfaction
affirming

Self-directed process

visual thinking
senses
inner feelings

art product

Visualization of thoughts and feelings



Art as intervention in serving secondary child victims of family violence

- A 1-year project
- Funded by the *Jean Ho Family Foundation*
- Collaborated between Lingnan University (*Dept of Visual Studies*) & *Social Welfare Department* (FCPSUTM)
- *Inter-professional* collaboration
- *social services + art therapy + academia*

Objectives

- create *a joyful, self-directed and safe platform* for the child victims to release their inner feelings through creativity;
- facilitate effective counselling and *promote developmental growth* for the child victims;
- promote *interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge sharing* among professionals in the social services, art therapy and academia;
- study the effects of *using art in the social services for child victims* of family violence;
- *train the trainers* in the use of art for child victims of family violence in the social services.

Unique features

- *Inter-professional, inter-disciplinary*
- A core working team
- 5 social workers + 1 art therapist + 2 researchers
- *action research + art therapy approach*
- qualitative
- Participatory
- *grounded by different disciplinary theories*
- psycho-educational
- experiential learning
- art facilitation

2 series of 20-session art facilitation group workshops

24 secondary child victims of family violence

FCPSU TM

age, gender

traumatic exposure

First series

- 18 Sept 2015 - 22 Jan 2016
- 13 children (5 girls, 8 boys) aged 8 - 11 years

Second series

- 8 April 2016 - 22 July 2016
- 11 children (5 girls, 6 boys) aged 6 - 8 years

20-session art facilitation group workshops

psycho-educational approach

specialty and well structured
cognitive & emotional needs
witnesses & victims of family violence

theme-based (issues and needs)

- personal boundary
- different emotions
- resources for resilience
- from a distance to a progressively more personal perspective

key objective

- *expressing their inner thoughts and feelings in a self-directed and non-verbal way*

Evaluation

- **qualitative measures**
- **direct observation** (detailed documentation of each child's performance)
- art work
- **pre- and post-series questionnaires** (Rosenberg Self-esteem, Goodman Strengths)
- **semi-structured interviews** (with both the child victims and their parents)
- **attendance**
- **feedback** from social workers, parents or carers
- **regular core working team meeting**
- **Session Observation Sheet** (RA)
- **Performance Sheet** for each child (art therapist, social worker and RA).
- **engagement, teamwork and expressiveness** were graded on a 5-point scale

Basic structure of the 2 series

3 stages:

- **Initial stage** – ice-breaking (3–4 sessions)
- **Middle stage** – creation (12–14 sessions)
- **End stage** – preparation for proper closure (3–4 sessions)

2 hours and 5 components:

- **Free Play** – 2 sections structured at the beginning and the end (20 minutes each)
- **Discussion/Warm up games** (15 minutes)
- **Creation** (40 minutes)
- **Cleaning up** (10 minutes)
- **Sharing** (15 minutes)

Findings

concerning child victims of family violence

- often have lots of secrets to hide
- ideas of killing, death and weapons are common in their works
- have mixed feelings and confused emotions
- have boundary issues
- expression of younger victims is more direct and straightforward



Findings

art and child victims of family violence

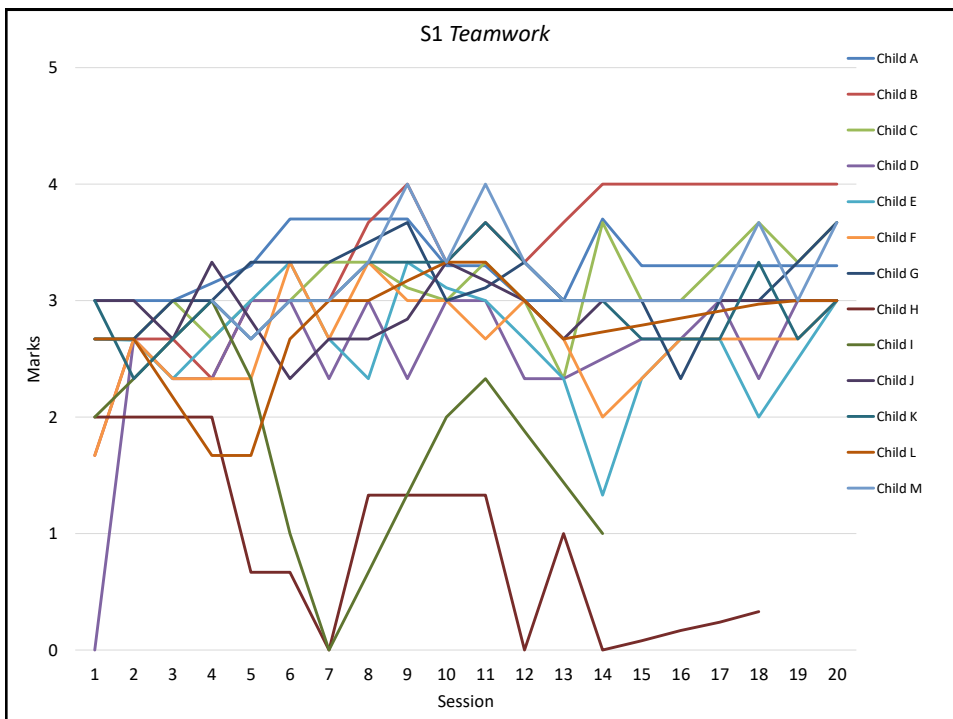
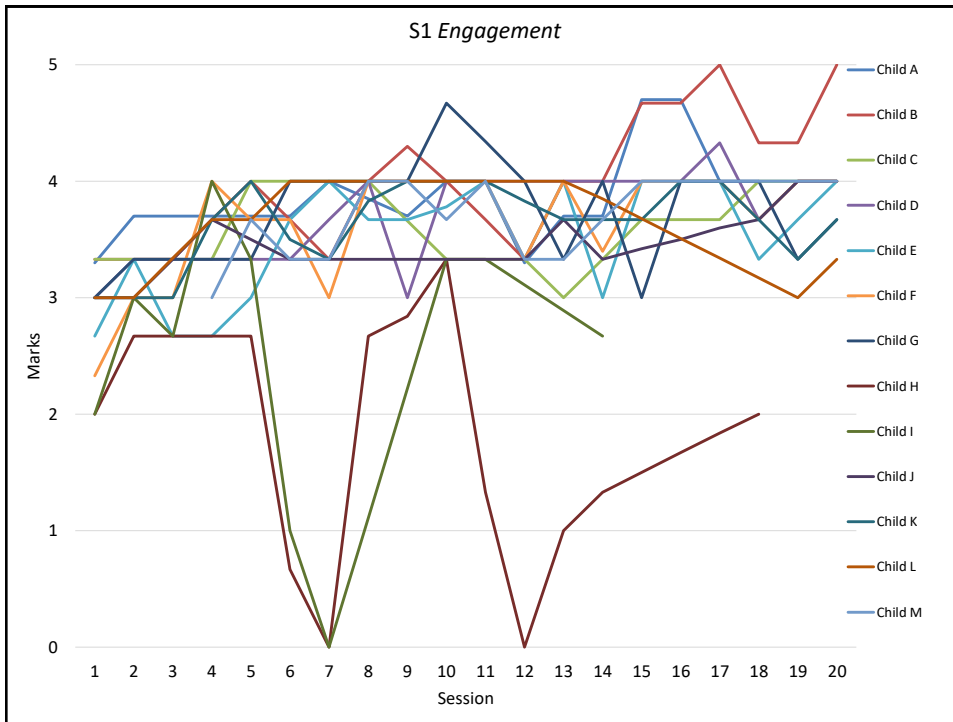
- Art gets children engaged and connected
 - Art facilitates expression, articulation and imagination
 - Games and creative processes are effective in revealing the hidden emotions and specific needs of a child victim
 - Art and creation can contain negative emotions
 - Art promotes positive values for the child victims
 - Art enhances social interaction
-
- Train the trainers through inter-professional collaboration

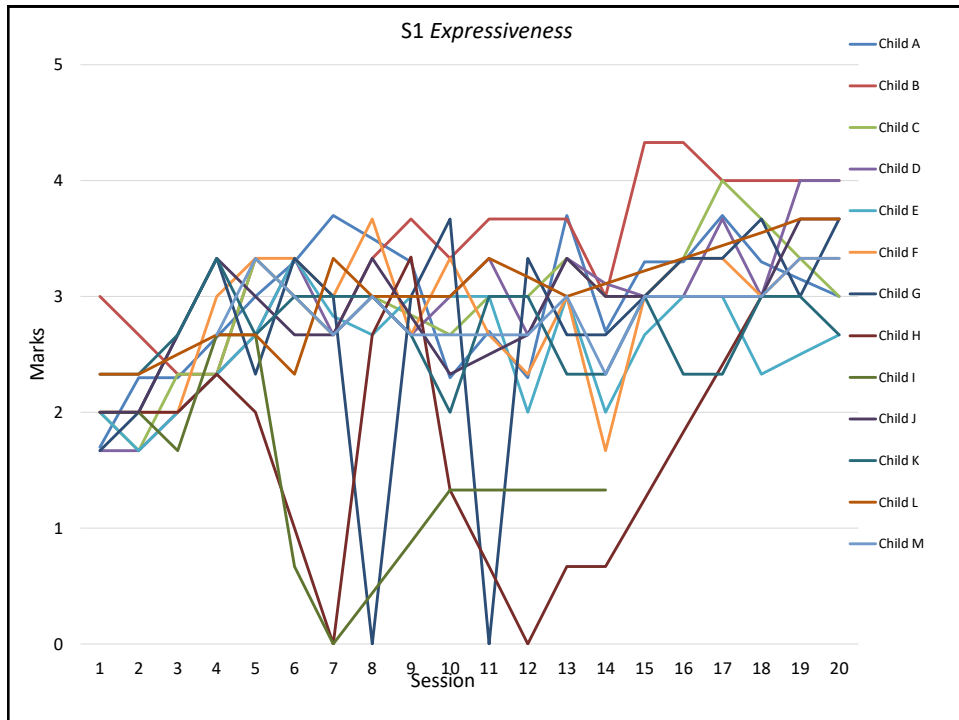
Series 1		
CHILD	No. of sessions attended	Attendance %
A	17	85%
B	19	95%
C	18	90%
D	19	95%
E	18	90%
F	20	100%
G	18	90%
H	14	70%
I	10	50%
J	14	70%
K	20	100%
L	12	60%
M	17	85%

Series 2		
CHILD	No. of sessions attended	Attendance %
a	14	70%
b	19	95%
c	19	95%
d	18.5	92.5%
e	18.5	92.5%
f	20	100%
g	17	85%%
h	8.5	42.5%
i	9.5	47.5%
j	12	60%
k	20	100%

CHILD	Engagement		Team work		Expressiveness	
	first	last	first	last	first	last
	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
A	3.3	4	3	3.33	1.7	3
B	3.33	5	3	4	1.67	4
C	3.33	4	2.67	3.67	2	3
D	3	4	2.67	3	2.67	4
E	2.67	4	2.67	3	2	2.667
F	2.33	4	1.67	3	2	3.33
G	3	3.67	2.67	3.67	1.67	3.67
H	2	2	2	0.33	2	3
I	2	2.67	2	1	2	1.33
J	3	4	3	3	2	3.67
K	3	3.67	3	3	2.33	2.67
L	3	3.33	2.67	3	2.33	3.67
M	3	4	3	3.67	2.67	3.33

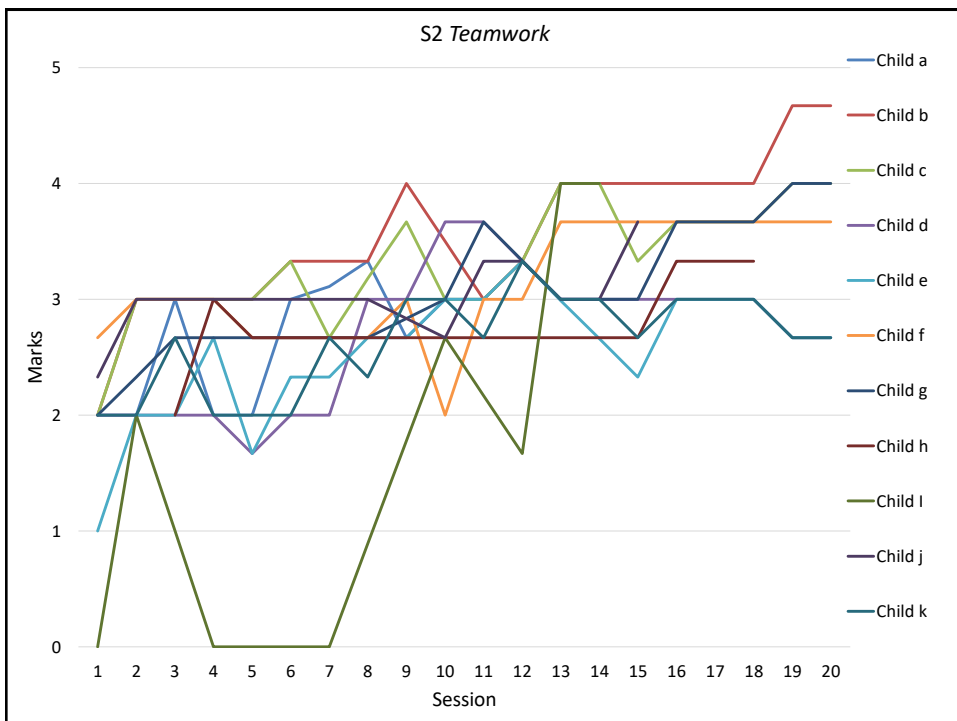
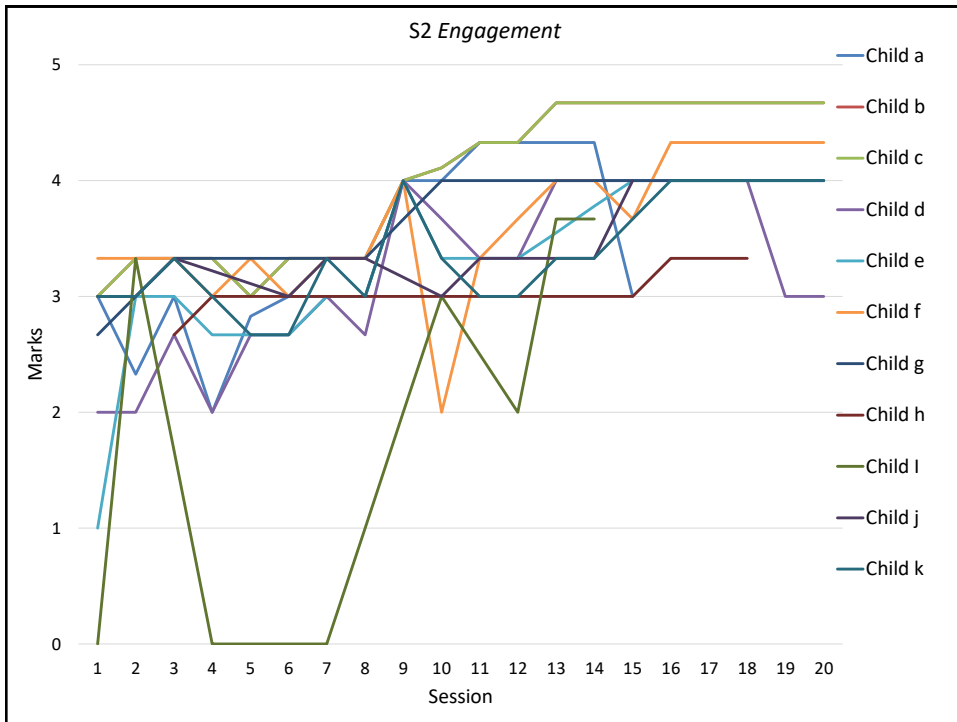
Series 1: Comparison of the first & last performance index (number of child victims involved: 13)

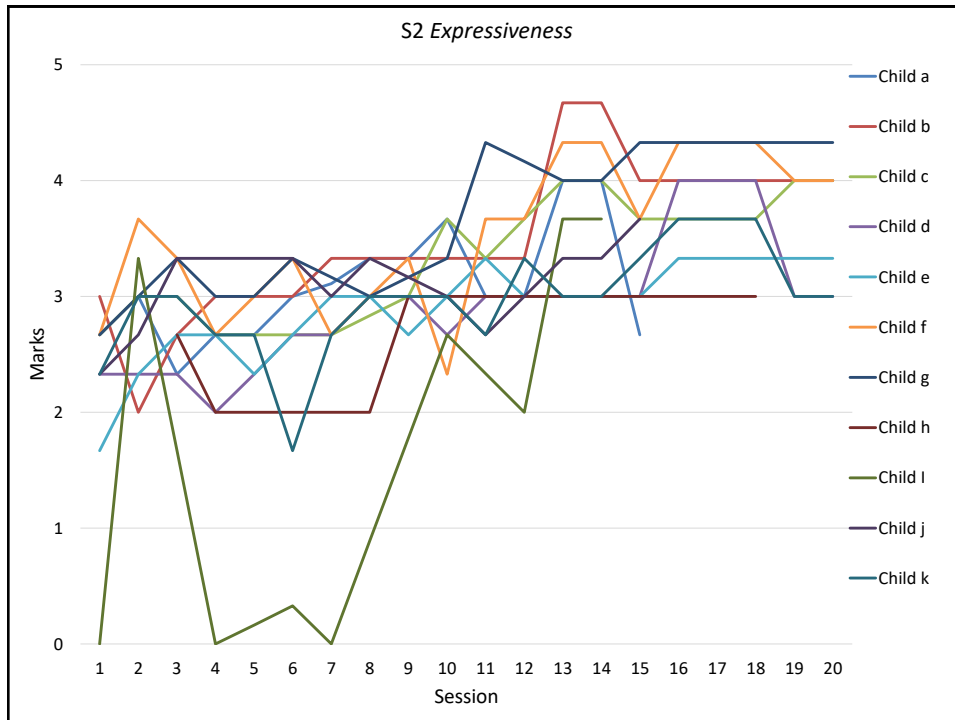




CHILD	Engagement		Team work		Expressiveness	
	first	last	first	last	first	last
	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
a	3	3	2	3	2.67	2.67
b	3	4.67	2	4.67	3	4
c	3	4.67	2	4	2.67	4
d	2	3	2	2.67	2.33	3
e	1	4	1	2.67	1.67	3.33
f	3.33	4.33	2.67	3.67	2.67	4
g	2.67	4	2	4	2.67	4.33
h	2.67	3.33	2	3.33	2.67	3
i*	0	3.67	0	4	0	3.67
j	3	4	2.33	3.67	2.33	3.67
k	3	4	2	2.67	2.33	3

Series 2: Comparison of the first & last performance index (number of child victims involved: 11)





Art as intervention in serving secondary child victims of family violence

- a **non-verbal** platform
- **joyful**
- *expression, release of repressed emotion*
- *articulation of inner feelings – recognition, acceptance*
- contained, supportive, educational
- **values of respect, sharing, boundary**



Art as intervention in serving secondary child victims of family violence

- **Cognitive development**
- **Emotional needs**
- **Experiential learning** – boundary, safety, trust
- **Internalization** – positive memories - values

Child developmental growth

expression (communication)

recognition (acceptance)

support (love, trust, safety, respect)



ART

*as intervention in serving
secondary child victims of family violence*

INTRODUCTION & MANUAL

<https://works.bepress.com/sophialaw/bepress>

SOPHIA LAW



Thank You

Boy G *The Horrible World*