

Art Therapy and Childhood



A PATH TO
WELL-BEING
IN THE FACE
OF CHILDHOOD
TRAUMA
(BRUNDIBÁR)

This report has been coordinated by Marián López Fernández-Cao and Ana Serrano Navarro. In the Brundibár project, Celia Camilli and Mónica Fontana designed and supervised the research methodology, while Marián López Fernández-Cao and Ana Serrano Navarro designed and supervised the intervention methodology. The results were developed based on the individual final reports of the collaborating art therapists who implemented the workshops (Lina Camila Aguirre, Camila Cooper, Marta Gómez, Estíbaliz Gutiérrez, and Yolanda Fernández), and Tamara González, who participated as part of her predoctoral contract. Theoretical and methodological contributions to both intervention and research were also made by the project coordinators (Marián López Fernández-Cao, Ana Serrano Navarro, Celia Camilli, and Mónica Fontana).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION AND JUSTIFICATION. The practice of art is restorative, as affirmed by a 2019 World Health Organization report, which shows that cultural and artistic activities promote health, not only as the absence of illness but also in its physical, mental, and social dimensions. Art improves symptoms associated with physical and mental illnesses and provides psychological, physiological, and social benefits. Art positively influences health and holistic well-being at all stages of life and, historically, it has helped children to face and overcome extreme situations.

Thus, the commitment to a childhood free of violence and the belief in art as a path to recovery support this pioneering project in Spain, in a collaboration between university and society. The EARTDI research group—Applications of Art in Social Inclusion: Art, Therapy, and Education for Inclusion—from Complutense University of Madrid (UCM) has extensive experience in art education for inclusion, art therapy, and art education in equality. One of its R&D research projects, Brundibár, aims to investigate intervention methodologies to help children and adolescents overcome adverse experiences through art. It is in this project that the collaboration between Save the Children (SCE) and UCM is framed.

OBJECTIVES. This project aims to support children and adolescents who have suffered violence through art therapy. Art therapy is a specific therapeutic approach that uses creative processes, through artistic language, to support and facilitate psychotherapeutic processes and promote bio-psycho-social well-being. It differs from other therapies in the following criteria: Using artistic media as a form of expression and communication, incorporating multi-level meaning in visual expression, and the therapeutic impact of the creative process.

CONTEXT. Over three years, the project worked with minors in Child and Adolescent Resource Centers (CRIA) across Spain. In the years 2021/22, through two pilot workshops, and, in the years 2022-23 and 2023-24, in the CRiAs of Vallecas and Leganés (Madrid), Illescas (Castilla-La Mancha), Seville (Andalusia), and Barakaldo (Basque Country). The intervention was group-based and consisted of 20 sessions lasting 75 to 90 minutes each.

INTERVENTION DESIGN. Art therapy was delivered in a group format characterised by prolonged intervention with closed groups and with a concrete focus or objective. Key tools included:

- » Metaphor as a symbolic element

- » Storytelling (narrating and self-narrative) using the Six-Part Story Method
- » Use of artworks via the “Proyecta” tool

The connection with the materials and the subject matter, as well as the Continuum Model of Expressive Therapies, have also been integral to the design of the intervention, together with the use of the museum space as a normalising and destigmatising environment.

RESEARCH DESIGN. This is a quasi-experimental, longitudinal, and prospective study covering the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 in which some participants are involved in both years. Data collection techniques included:

- » Observation logs (Likert Scale) based on six dimensions
- » Field diaries
- » Artworks from the “Proyecta” tool

The metaphors have been part of the Intervention Design as well as the Research Design. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (Observational Registers and Likert Scale). Qualitative data were analysed inductively (Field Diaries, metaphors and Proyecta). The study adhered to the SCE Child Safeguarding Policy and code of conduct.

RESULTS. The study analysed data from 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, excluding the pilot phase corresponding to 2021-2022. Five SCE centres participated with 13 groups of children, aged 6 to 11. The sample included 102 children (49 in 2022-2023 and 53 in 2023-2024), aged 6 to 18. Only 29% were 12 years or older. Of the 20 sessions of the intervention, 33% of the children attended 16 or more, and 77% attended 11 or more. Findings from the observation logs provide valuable insight on several aspects:

a) Art therapy proved effective across all dimensions: nonverbal communication, engagement with materials, relationship to the process (with the technique) mentalisation/consciousness in respect to the artwork, peer relationships, and relationships with art therapists/facilitator.

b) A statistically significant positive linear effect was observed over time. In each session there was an increase in the global score in all dimensions. Similarly, metaphor analysis led to additional research results:

1. Eight metaphor sub-categories grouped in three types of metaphors were described: identification metaphors, conflict metaphors (problem, conflict, desire or mission), and resolution metaphors (resolution transformation, re-signification).

2. Moon's metaphor classifications (2007) were revised: visual, auditive, kinetic, environment and therapeutic metaphors.

3. New categories of metaphors were created: animated, living and organic (animals, people, nature—both places and elements), inanimate and inorganic metaphors (objects, buildings, human-made elements), formal metaphors (colour, shape), kinetic/action metaphors (running, flying, swimming, etc.), and qualitative metaphors (more complex to categorise).

Regarding the case studies, case 1 is Elena (9 years old, the name has been changed). Through materials exploration their tri-dimensional productions grew exponentially and with it, confidence in her own abilities, allowing them to express themselves in the space in a more genuine and free manner. Case 2 is B (18 years old), who attends the sessions looking for a space to express themselves and reinforce their processes using plastic arts. During the artistic therapeutic process, they transform their art work as a way to give voice to life experiences and reinterpret difficult moments and emotions.

CONCLUSIONS. Art and artistic images serve as extensions of the self—mirrors in which one can feel seen and reflected; safe spaces where personal experiences can be projected and named; and catalysts for personal creative processes, that is, for the elaboration and transformation of one's inner imagery into forms that can be communicated to others and to the world. These expressions may become part of culture as a space of encounter and inclusion, even when emerging from suffering or from that which is difficult to articulate.

It is hoped that this report will contribute to the implementation of necessary policies and actions aimed at consolidating art therapy as a valuable resource for the protection of children and adolescents, enabling them to become active agents in their own life and recovery processes. Through the construction of personal narratives and the experience of accompanied creation, they may envision a possible and liveable future.



SCE CONTEXT

According to the World Health Organization, between 10% and 20% of adolescents globally experience mental health issues, and half of all mental illnesses begin before the age of 14. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the situation, revealing long-ignored problems. In Spain, concern for children and adolescent mental health has grown significantly in recent years.

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The pandemic had a significant impact on the mental health of children and adolescence, especially in vulnerable families. SCE's Growing Healthily report¹ states that conditions like anxiety, stress, suicidal thoughts, and eating disorders became more common during the pandemic. In 2020, 3% of children and adolescents had suicidal thoughts. The healthcare system struggled to respond due to long waiting lists, highlighting the scale of this "parallel pandemic."

UNICEF's 2021 State of the World's Children report² showed that 20.8% of children aged 10 to 19 in Spain suffered from diagnosed mental health problems: the highest rate in Europe. At a global level, more than 1 out of 7 adolescents, ages 10-19, had a diagnosed mental health problem.

POST-PANDEMIC SITUATION

In 2022, more than half of the Spanish population (57%) reported feeling worried, fearful, depressed, or sad. The main causes of this decline in emotional well-being were economic hardship, uncertainty about the future, and the stress of daily life, followed by the impact of the pandemic and the perception of an increasingly individualistic and competitive society.

UNICEF's 2023-2024 Youth Opinion Barometer³ reported that 41.1% of adolescents had experienced mental health problems in the previous year. Over one-third had not talked to anyone about it, and more than half had not sought help. Issues included low self-esteem, substance abuse, physical health problems, and financial hardship. Additionally, 32.3% said excessive mobile or internet use harmed their mental health

1 Growing Healthily Report

2 In my mind: promote, protect and care for children's mental health - UNICEF

3 Youth Opinion Barometer 2023-2024

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE UKRAINE CONFLICT

Since the pandemic, economic hardship worsened by the war in Ukraine has reduced family incomes or caused job losses.

CHILDREN IN LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS-THOSE SERVED BY SAVE THE CHILDREN-ARE OVER FOUR TIMES MORE LIKELY TO SUFFER FROM MENTAL OR BEHAVIOURAL DISORDERS THAN THOSE IN HIGH-INCOME HOMES (13% VS. 3%).

FLACK OF RESOURCES AND WAITING LIST

There are long waiting lists to access mental health services in Spain and a shortage of specialised professionals. The Spanish Society of Child Psychiatry and the Spanish Association of Primary Care Paediatrics have called for more resources and the incorporation of clinical psychologists in health centres. Improved coordination between health services, schools, and families is also urgently needed to offer integral support to children and adolescents.

CONCLUSIONS

Children's mental health in Spain faces numerous challenges. The pandemic increased mental disorders and suicidal behaviours, and issues such as bullying, cyberbullying, and sexual abuse remain prevalent. Addressing the lack of resources and long waiting times to access mental health services is crucial for improving children's and adolescents' well-being.



**SAVE THE CHILDREN
SPAIN AND COMPLUTEN-
SE UNIVERSITY OF
MADRID**

“ALL CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT TO A FUTURE.”

At Save the Children, we work every day to ensure that all children survive, learn, and are protected from violence. We bring lasting change to the lives of millions of children, including those hardest to reach. We do whatever it takes to help every child in changing their life and shaping the future we are building together.

We work in more than 120 countries to uphold the rights of millions of children and to help build a fairer world and society for childhood. In Spain, our efforts are coordinated through five regional offices located in the Community of Madrid, Catalonia, Andalusia, the Valencian Community, and the Basque Country. All our actions are guided by a deep sense of responsibility, the vital support of our allies, and, above all, an unwavering commitment to the children we serve and defend.

It is within this framework—of striving for a childhood free from violence and the current global context—that the partnership between Save the Children Spain and the EARTDI Research Group⁴ (Applications of Art in Social Inclusion: Art, Therapy, and Education for Inclusion) of the Complutense University of Madrid was born.

This collaboration between the university and civil society contributes to the improvement of prevention, detection, and care services for children who have experienced or may be at risk of experiencing violence, through the integration of art therapy services. This integration helps prevent and mitigate the symptoms and distress associated with the long-term consequences of such violence.

This report presents the results of this partnership through the R&D research project: “Brun-dibár: the creative process and art therapy as a path to well-being after childhood trauma.” This innovative, pioneering project in Spain is grounded in a shared commitment to a childhood free of violence and a belief in art as a tool for prevention and recovery.

⁴ EARTDI Research Group. Complutense University of Madrid

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Save the Children values the trust shown by every child and adolescent who participated in the interventions, as well as the dedication of the art therapists who accompanied them throughout these three years: Patricia Landínez, Lucía Hervás, Camila Cooper, Yolanda Fernández, Estíbaliz Gutiérrez, Tamara González, Lina Aguirre, and Marta Gómez.

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THE BRUNDIBÁR PROJECT

WHAT IS ART THERAPY? DEFINITION AND ORIENTATION OF THE INTERVENTION

In November 2019, the World Health Organization published a report highlighting the benefits of art for health and well-being. Across its 150 pages, the report acknowledged the intercultural nature of art and its core components for human development, such as aesthetic engagement, imagination, sensory and cognitive stimulation, emotional evocation, and social interaction. Among its benefits: psychological: (increased self-esteem, improved coping strategies, and emotional regulation—especially relevant in bullying contexts), physiological (lower stress hormone levels, improved immune function, enhanced cardiovascular response), social (reduced loneliness and isolation, improved social support), behavioural (increased body awareness and regulation, strengthened creativity, adoption of more connected behaviours, development of skills).

Throughout history, art has helped children face and overcome extreme situations. This dual commitment—to a childhood free from violence and to art as a means of recovery—drives this pioneering and innovative project: a collaboration between university and civil society to improve prevention and care services for children who have experienced violence. By integrating art therapy, it aims to reduce the medium- and long-term symptoms and consequences of violence, drawing on the experience of an established research group and an institution that stands as a true example of commitment to children.

To understand what art therapy work entails, the Spanish Federation of Professional Art Therapy Associations (FEAPA), defines art therapy as follows: as specific therapeutic approach that uses the creative process through artistic language to support and facilitate psychotherapeutic processes and promote bio-psycho-social well-being. This takes place within an informed therapeutic relationship and is intended for individuals or groups who need it.

Art therapy is rooted in the therapeutic potential of artistic creation, inside an adequate framing, aiming to promote transformation in areas such as: personal and social empowerment, expressive and creative development, subjective repositioning, symptomatic treatment

Since its emergence in Europe in the mid-20th century, many theorists and practitioners have advanced the field through both theoretical contributions and empirical results from their interventions, leading to the development of what we now understand as the main orientations and fields of practice within art therapy.

Over the past two decades, significant efforts have been made in Spain to publish books related to art therapy intervention and research by various authors, such as Coll Espinosa, 2006; Domínguez Toscano, 2005, 2014; Domínguez Toscano et al., 2018; Domínguez Toscano & Montero Domínguez, 2022; Esteban Argues y Domínguez Toscano, 2014; Fernández et al.,

2021; López Fdz. Cao, 2006, 2011, 2015, 2018a, 2018b; López Fdz. Cao y Martínez Díez, 2006; Martínez Díez y López Fdz. Cao., 2004, 2009; Marxen, 2011a; Rico Caballo, 2012; and Rueda Cuenca, 2020. These texts have become key references for art therapy students and researchers in the field.

Art therapy differs from other therapies in three main ways: the use of artistic materials for expression and communication, the presence of multilayered meaning in visual expressions, and the therapeutic impact of the creative process itself (Lusebrink, 2010). Recent studies have shown that art therapy has neurological underpinnings and can foster psychological health in people facing trauma. Art therapy helps mitigate stress through emotional regulation, cognitive processing, and the sense of control. At art therapy sessions, aesthetic countertransference (Schaverien, 2000) comes in. This triangular relationship broadens the perspective on the participant, as they are able to experience their connection with the “external world” through transference with the therapist, while simultaneously expressing aspects of their “internal world” through visual artistic discourse. Moreover, the attuned relationship with the art therapist contributes to reflecting and repairing disruptions in attachment. In this regard, Serrano (2020), referring to the potential of art therapy in addressing and preventing childhood trauma, asserts that ‘emotional attunement and the feeling of being felt would be key elements at our disposal, alongside alternative modes of communication, in achieving change’ (p. 220). Through sensory and experiential exploration with various materials and the use of metaphor, art therapy facilitates the emergence of new ways of coping with adverse experiences. As Rubin (1984) noted, when symbolic aspects of images are accessed in conjunction with verbal and cognitive elements, art therapy can offer an integrative opportunity to enhance an individual’s psycho-emotional well-being.

THE BRUNDIBÁR PROJECT

The Brundibar Project stems from the earlier Aletheia Project on art, trauma, and art therapy (Cury Abril, 2018; Levinton Dolman, 2016; López Fdz. Cao, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020; Marugán Krauss, 2016; Peral Jiménez, 2017), carried out by the EARTDI research group at the Complutense University of Madrid between 2016 and 2020.

The Brundibár Project⁵, named after a children's opera from the 1930s, captures the potential of the arts to overcome especially difficult moments for children. Brundibár embodies creativity, group work, coordination, and understanding through the creative process, as well as the commitment to an imagination capable of projecting solutions in the face of violence and evil.

The Brundibár project is based on a review of scientific literature that indicates that 'expressive arts help improve psychosocial well-being following childhood trauma and support general mental health by providing opportunities to share experiences in an empathetic environment through the symbolic expression of emotions in a concrete way'. It anchors its therapeutic potential 'in the relational and bonding aspects fostered by its framework', as well as 'in the possibilities it offers for symbolisation, communication, and the transformation of the narrative surrounding experiences of early deprivation, illness, loss or grief, and trauma, enabling their emotional integration and re-elaboration' (Serrano, 2020).

⁵ With music by Hans Krása and a Czech libretto by Adolf Hoffmeister, later adapted into a children's book with illustrations by Maurice Sendak and text by Tony Kushner. Hans Krása composed this opera (whose title means 'The Bumblebee') in 1938. It premiered in 1941. After his deportation to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, Hans Krása rewrote the score, as he had been unable to bring it with him. In the concentration camp, between 1942 and 1944, the opera was performed about 55 times by the children in the camp, managing to convey a sense of normality to the deported children.



**INTERVENTION
DESIGN**

GROUP THERAPY AND COMMON ASPECTS

The group art therapy model encourages verbal communication among participants during the creative process (Waller, 2012). While different orientations and group art therapy methods exist today, we will focus on the prolonged interventions with closed groups—where the same participants attend from start to finish—and a specific goal: the prevention of childhood trauma.

The following shared therapeutic aspects were established across all national interventions:

- » Creating a safe space.
- » Building a therapeutic alliance among all participants and art therapists, ensuring shared responsibility and confidentiality.
- » Increasing awareness of therapeutic transference.
- » Increasing awareness of the importance of theory-practice-theory integration in intervention.
- » Allowing time for meaningful and reflective activities during the closing phase of sessions.
- » Avoiding therapist interpretation of the children's creations.
- » Encouraging children to express the meaning of their work, fostering mentalisation and elaboration.
- » Undergoing professional external supervision⁶.
- » Guaranteeing confidentiality.
- » Following ethical standards in intervention and research.

⁶ In 2022/23, there was individual external supervision. In 2023/24, supervision was carried out by art therapist Dr. Beatriz Saorín, whose doctoral research informed part of the data collection.

INTERVENTION TOOLS: METAPHOR, STORYTELLING, AND ARTISTIC WORKS. METAPHOR IN THERAPY WITH CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

“METAPHORS ALLOW US TO SPEAK FROM A MORE HUMAN AND LESS PATHOLOGICAL, LESS DISTRESSING OR DESPERATE PLACE.” (THERAPIST TESTIMONY)

Metaphors provide alternative ways to name and understand difficult experiences. They help identify dominant narratives and offer opportunities for alternative narratives (Cardona and Osorio, 2014). In this sense, we can point out that metaphor enables greater plasticity; it offers other nuances that allow for the re-signification of the traumatic event. The narrative approach, alongside metaphors, allows the participant to develop their personal agency (Witney, 2012).

Symbolic play and storytelling are essential to child development. Metaphors act as bridges between thought and experience. As Satir (2002) explains, ‘the development of a new awareness by connecting or linking two events, ideas, characteristics, or meanings and transforming experiences from one form to another’ (Satir, in Gil Lujan et al., 2016). For this reason, the intentional introduction of metaphor as a symbolic element that bridges internal and external perceptions and states—through analogies, similes, and comparisons—helps to express identifications, conflicts, and desires. It also facilitates the understanding of internal processes and supports children and adolescents in working through these meanings, opening them up to new semantic and experiential dimensions.

THE CAPACITY TO TELL STORIES: SIX PART-STORY-METHOD

The Six-Part Story Method (6PSM) is a structured projective technique used to help participants build new narratives. It stems from studies on Russian folktales by Vladimir Propp (1968). The later semiological studies by Lucien Tesnière (1959) and Algirdas Greimas (1966) were based on Propp’s work, focusing on the tale as a “signifier” and on how its elements communicate some deeper meaning (the “signified”) from one person to another.

In the 1980s, Alida Gersie, an Anglo-Dutch dramatherapist, had the idea of taking the fundamental story structure proposed by Greimas and using it in reverse, as a skeleton on which to create new stories (Gersie, 2002). She taught this story-evocation technique to Mooli Lahad and Ofra Ayalon, who developed it through the Six Part-Story-Method (6PSM) as part of their project to identify coping styles in the general population. Dr Kim Dent-Brown has contri-

buted to promoting and researching 6PSM in the UK, emphasising its use in mental health interventions.

Moholy Lahad (1992) proposes that the story created demonstrates how the participant typically perceives or reacts to the world, using metaphorical communication through drawing (1st) and verbal storytelling (2nd), thus facilitating the identification of coping styles in the general population.

It is based on the assumption that the themes, conflicts, worldviews, problem-solving approaches, etc., that appear in the story will communicate something meaningful about the participants' own experience.

The 'blank slate' nature of the 6PSM allows for the creation and telling of a completely new story. Using metaphor, imagination, and full poetic license, the individual is free to create any story they wish. The story becomes both narrated and observed: the 'observing self' now has the ability to describe and reflect on their own experience without becoming trapped in it. The goal of the technique is 'to help the individual become self-aware and improve both external and internal communication', and its aim is 'to develop contact with the participant based on the therapist's understanding of the participant's "inner language"' (Lahad, 1992:156).

The six parts of the 6PSM framework are:

1. Creation of the main character
2. The character's mission
3. Obstacles
4. Helping factors
5. Climax or turning point
6. Resolution or story ending

In the context of this intervention, the generation of fictional narratives is encouraged within the creative process, either starting from a creation made with art materials during the session or with the intention of generating a narrative from the outset. This allows for the emergence of metaphors related to identification, conflict, and resolution. It offers many modes of application and alternative approaches, making it adaptable to the characteristics and needs of the participants.

INCLUSION OF ARTISTIC WORKS: PROYECTA TOOL

Proyecta is a validated tool that uses a collection of artistic images to support the identification, expression, and processing of emotions related to trauma and psychological stress and in challenging situations of vulnerability, psychological discomfort or Post Traumatic Stress. It was used to facilitate narrative and metaphor creation, and in some centers, it also served as a pre- and post-test assessment tool.

LA VINCULACIÓN CON LA MATERIA Y CONTINUO DE TERAPIAS EXPRESIVAS

The symbolic nature of materials refers to how materials are used not just for creating, but also for symbolic exploration and emotional processing.(López, 2011). Texture, shape, colour, and other properties hold meaning that can help participants to discover, process and represent feelings and experiences in a more profound manner.

The Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC), developed by Vija Lusebrink and Sandra Kagin in 1987, categorises expressive therapies into four levels of expression and communication: sensory, affective, cognitive, and integrative (Lüsebrink, 1991).

TRANFERING THE ART THERAPY EXPERIENCE TO THE MUSEUM

The museum visit, included as part of this proposal, becomes a bridge between the institution and society, offering a welcoming space to children who are sometimes stigmatised or otherwise distanced from the museum context. It legitimises and dignifies their social and emotional status through cultural engagement. Precisely because artists have expressed their emotional and mental states, the museum can serve as a space for experiences of recognition—experiences that connect these children with the essence of the human condition, allowing them to see themselves reflected in the artworks and to be accepted and respected by both the group and society. The artwork thus becomes a transitional and transformational object between the child and the world—linking their internal and external realities, the inner and outer aspects of the observer. These visits foster connection with society and its cultural environment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

A. Context of the Intervention and Research. Over the course of three years, the project engaged with minors at the Childhood and Adolescence Resource Centers (CRIA) across the country: during the 2021/22 academic year through two pilot workshops, and during the 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years at the CRIA centers in Vallecas and Leganés (Community of Madrid), Illescas (Castilla-La Mancha), Seville (Andalusia), and Barakaldo (Basque Country). The intervention was conducted in groups through cycles of 20 sessions, each lasting between 75 and 90 minutes. The present report analyses the 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 cycles, excluding the pilot phase corresponding to the 2021–2022 academic year.

B. Research Design and Data Collection Techniques. The research employed a quasi-experimental, longitudinal, and prospective design. Longitudinal studies involve observing individuals or groups during a certain period of time, which can go from a few months to years, and even as much as multi-generational. In this case, it spanned two academic years, 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 with some minors involved in both.

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES INCLUDED:

» Observation Logs: A four-point Likert Scale (0=Never/Nothing, 1=Hardly ever/Very little, 2=Sometimes/A little, 3=Almost always/Quite a lot, 4=Always/A lot, and NA=Not applicable), comprising 59 items across six dimensions (49 positive, 10 negative):

- Nonverbal communication: 11 items (3 negative)
- Relationship with materials: 7 items (2 negative)
- Relationship with the process/technique: 18 items (4 negative)
- Mentalisation/consciousness regarding artwork: 12 items
- Peer relationships: 9 items
- Relationship with the art therapist/facilitator: 2 items (1 negative)

» Field Diaries: Provided qualitative records of each art therapy session to explain, expand and deepen the information on the observation logs. The log has been instrumental identifying key metaphors.

» Proyecto Tool: Used both during the intervention and as a pre/post-test assessment tool in a limited number of centres.

C. DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

OBSERVATION LOGS: For the analysis of the observational records, Excel 2013 and STATA 17 software were used. The analyses conducted were as follows:

» **Descriptive Analysis:** The descriptive analysis was conducted for the total sample as well as by academic year (2022–2023 and 2023–2024). Absolute and relative frequencies are presented, along with the median and interquartile range (25th–75th percentile), which provide insight into the developmental progress of the participants. Negative items were recoded as positive to facilitate the interpretation of the graphs. For instance, ‘defensive attitude’ is considered a negative item, as higher scores indicate less progress. Once recoded, scores approaching 4 in the graphs indicate a decrease in defensive attitudes. Therefore, higher scores reflect positive progression. This recoding was applied to the 10 negative items on the scale.

» **Overall Program Effect:** To assess the effect of the art therapy program, ordered logistic regression models with multilevel mixed effects were fitted, with participants nested within groups and centers. This type of model allows for the analysis of ordinal variables, such as Likert-type scales, enabling the estimation of the linear effect of the number of sessions on the probability of response for each item. The resulting odds ratios (OR) are interpreted as the likelihood of obtaining a higher score with each additional session. These estimates are reported alongside their corresponding 95% confidence intervals (95% CI). The same models were used to estimate the effect by academic year through a stratified analysis.

» **Program Effect by Dimension:** To evaluate the effect of the six dimensions that comprise the observational record—dimensions in which changes are expected following the intervention—two measures of overall effect were considered: the mean of the items within each dimension and, alternatively, their sum. To assess the effect of the art therapy program by dimension, a methodology similar to that used for evaluating the overall program effect was followed, but linear mixed models were applied instead.

METAPHOR CATEGORISATION: The categorisation of metaphors was carried out through an inductive qualitative analysis. This strategy is characterised by its bottom-up approach, in which researchers generate knowledge and propose new theories that emerge directly from the data. The construction of categories, subcategories, and codes involved a rigorous and systematic analysis, continuously reviewed and contrasted with existing literature. The analysis was supported by the use of **Atlas.ti** software, version 23.

D. UNIVERSITY-SCE COLLABORATION. The research team monitored the implementation of the observational record, as well as the qualitative field notes, through on-site visits to the centers and regular online follow-up meetings with the art therapists. In addition, PROYECTA was monitored as a tool for intervention and was also used in a few centres as a pretest and posttest instrument.

E. RESEARCH ETHICS. The research adhered strictly to Save the Children's Child Safeguarding Policy and its Code of Conduct.



RESULTS REPORTS

Sample overview. The study involves five SCE centres with a total of 13 groups from 6 to 11 participants per group (Table 1).

		2022-2023	2023-2024	Total
		N	N	N
No. of centres		5	5	5
No. of groups		6	7	13
No. of participants/group	6		3	3
	7	3	1	4
	8		1	1
	9	2	1	3
	10	1		1
	11		1	1

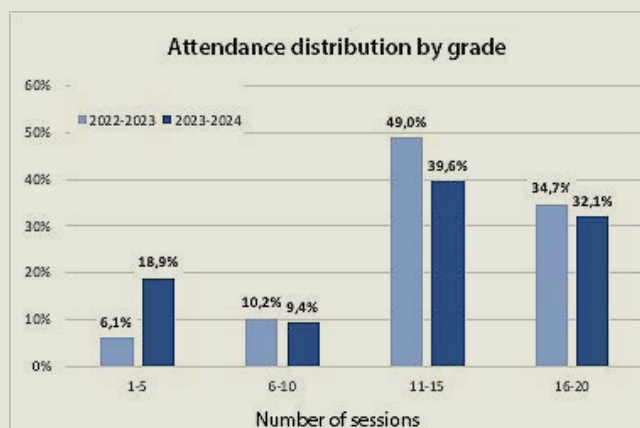
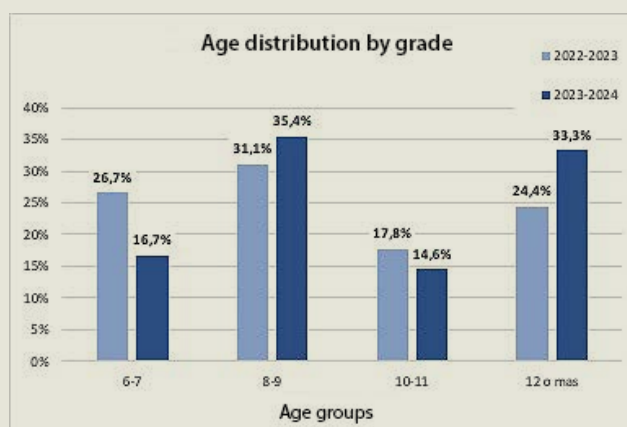
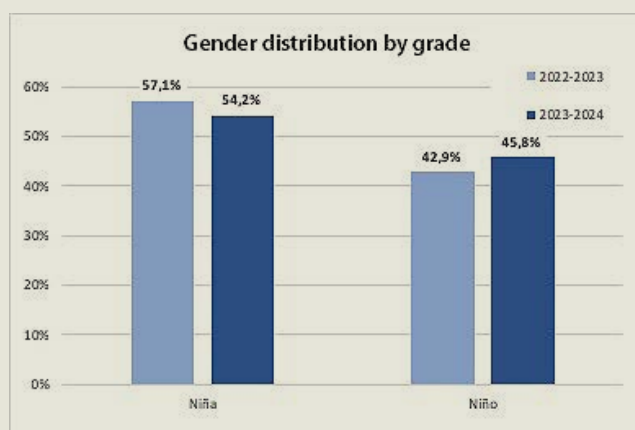
Table 1. Description of the number of participating centres and groups.

The study sample consisted of 102 participants—49 in the 2022–2023 academic year and 53 in 2023–2024—who took part in the program. Participants ranged in age from 6 to 18 years, with only 29% of the sample aged 12 or older. Girls represented 56.7% of the total sample (Table 2). The age and gender distributions were similar across both academic years (Table 2, Figure 1, and Figure 2). Twenty-nine participants repeated the program in the 2023–2024 academic year.

		2022-2023		2023-2024		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
No. of participants		49		53		102	
Repeat students	29						
Age	6-7	12	26.7%	8	16.7%	20	21.5%
	8-9	14	31.1%	17	35.4%	31	33.3%
	10-11	8	17.8%	7	14.6%	15	16.1%
	12 o más	11	24.4%	16	33.3%	27	29.0%
Gender	Female	29	59.2%	26	54.2%	55	56.7%
	Male	20	40.8%	22	45.8%	42	43.3%

Attendance (No. of sessions)	1-5	3	6.1%	10	18.9%	13	12.7%
	6-10	5	10.2%	5	9.4%	10	9.8%
	11-15	24	49.0%	21	39.6%	45	44.1%
	16-20	17	34.7%	17	32.1%	34	33.3%

Table 2. Description of participants' socio-demographic characteristics and level of attendance.



Of the 20 sessions comprising the intervention, 33% of participants attended 16 or more sessions, and 77% attended at least 11 sessions (Table 2). Attendance was slightly higher in the 2022–2023 academic year, with 84% of participants attending 11 or more sessions, compared to 72% in 2023–2024 who attended 16 or more. Thirteen children (3 in 2022–2023 and 10 in 2023–2024) attended fewer than 6 sessions (Table 2 and Figure 3). Therefore, these 13 participants will be excluded from the analysis.

OVERALL EFFECT OF THE PROGRAMME. The art therapy program proved effective across all dimensions. The following section describes its specific effects within each of them.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION. A statistically significant effect of the intervention was observed across all items within the 'Non-verbal Language' dimension, with the exception of 'Body Awareness' and 'Psychosomatic Complaints'. Additionally, scores on the negative items 'De-

‘Defensive Attitude’ and ‘Physical Rigidity’ decreased. The remaining items, which are of a positive nature, showed increased scores, with notable improvements in ‘Engages the body in the creative process’ and ‘Voice tone is appropriate to the context’ (Figures 4C and 4D).

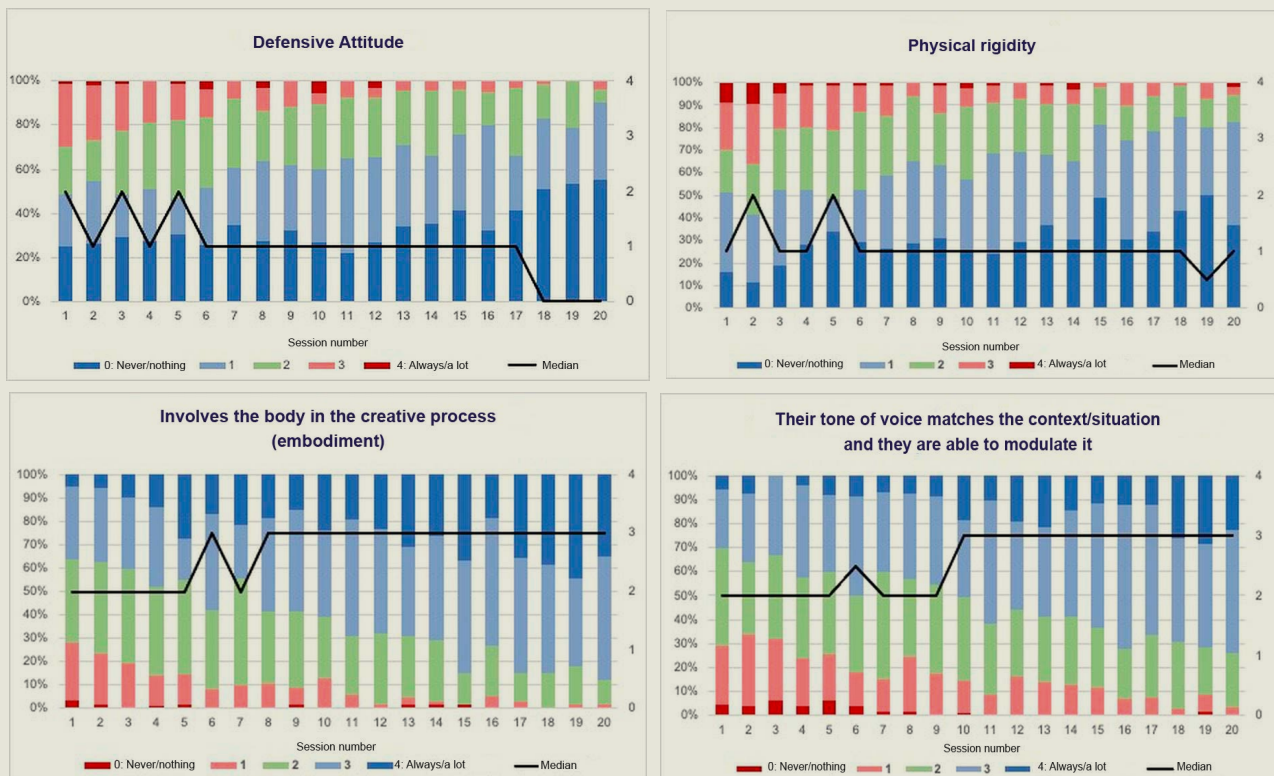


Figure 4. Effect of the program on the items ‘Defensive Attitude’, ‘Physical Rigidity’, ‘Engages the body in the creative process’, and ‘Voice tone is appropriate to the context’.

In the stratified analysis by academic year, a larger effect size is observed in the 2022–2023 cohort for most items within the ‘Non-verbal Language’ dimension, except for ‘Body Regulation’. This finding may reflect a greater initial impact at the start of the intervention, followed by less improvement in the second year. Notably, the item ‘Body Awareness’ shows a divergent effect, decreasing in 2022–2023 and increasing in 2023–2024.

RELATIONSHIP WITH MATERIALS. Within the ‘Relationship with Materials’ dimension, a statistically significant effect of the intervention was observed across all items, particularly for ‘Demonstrates tolerance to frustration’ and ‘Expresses pleasure in contact with certain materials’ (Figure 5).

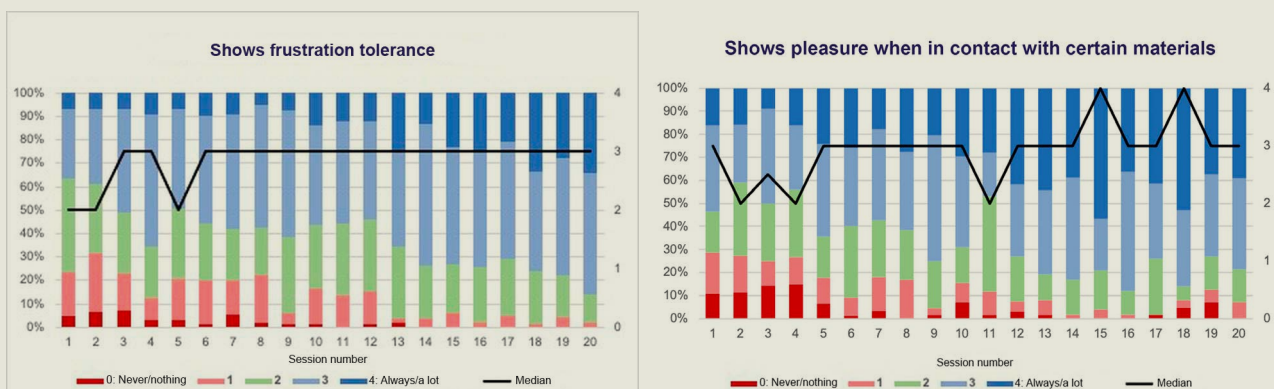
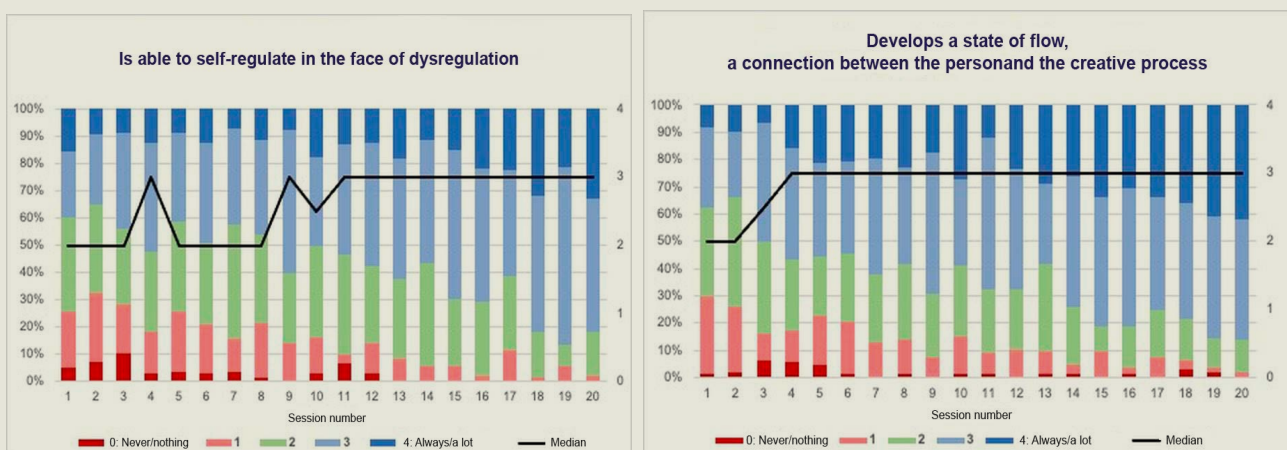


Figure 5. Effect of the programme on the items 'Demonstrates tolerance to frustration' and 'Expresses pleasure in contact with certain materials'.

In the stratified analysis by academic year, a larger effect size is observed in 2022–2023 for the items 'Expresses pleasure in contact with certain materials' (20% vs. 12%) and 'Demonstrates tolerance to frustration' (24% vs. 13%), as well as for the negative item 'Expresses rejection in contact with certain materials' (-14% vs. -1%). It is also noteworthy that the negative item 'Need for control over the material' shows no effect in 2022–2023, while in 2023–2024 it has a 4% effect.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PROCESS, WITH THE TECHNIQUE. A statistically significant effect of the intervention was observed in all items within the 'Relationship with the Process, with the Technique' dimension, except for 'Includes details of objects and environment', 'Uses abstract language', and 'If discomfort, external locus of control'. Conversely, the items showing the greatest improvement effects were 'Able to self-regulate in the face of loss of control,' 'Develops a state of flow, person/creative process connection,' 'Confidence in abilities,' and 'Predominant use of touch/three-dimensionality' (Figure 6).



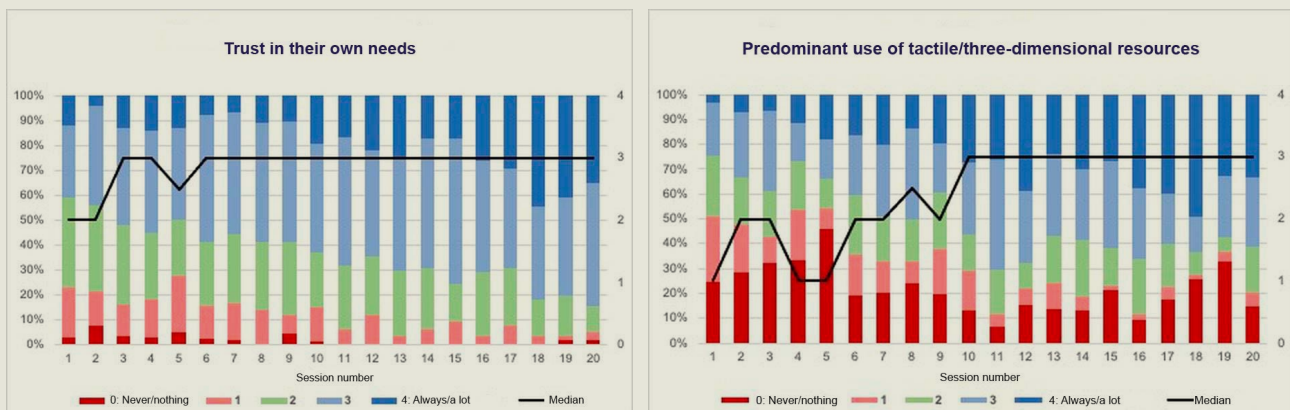
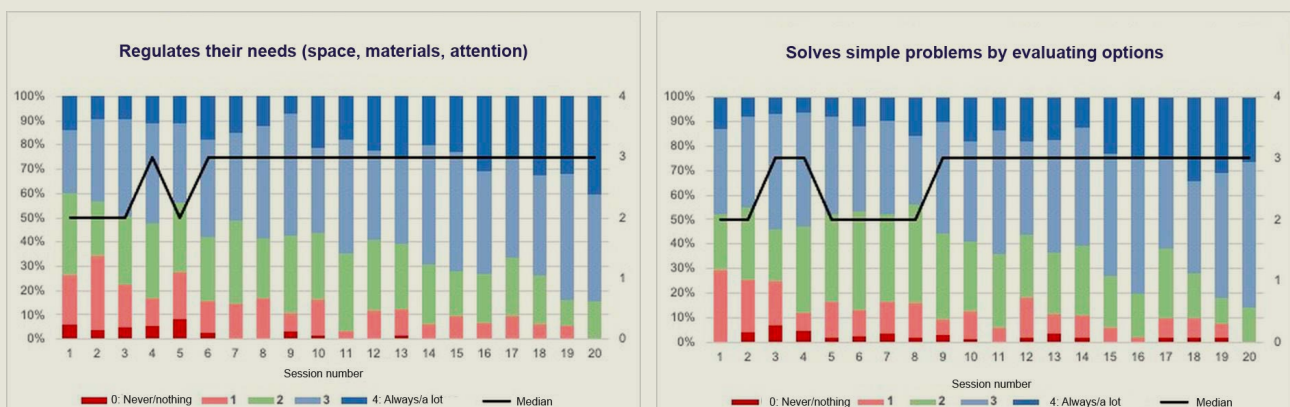


Figure 6. Effect of the program on the items 'Develops a state of flow, person/creative process connection', 'Predominant use of touch/three-dimensionality', 'Able to self-regulate in the face of loss of control', and 'Confidence in abilities'.

In the stratified analysis by academic year, a generally larger effect size is observed in 2022–2023, with the greatest differences in the items 'Demonstrates age-appropriate graphic/plastic development' (17% vs. 9%), 'Plans creative process according to objectives' (18% vs. 11%), 'Able to self-regulate in the face of loss of control' (22% vs. 13%), and 'Confidence in abilities' (20% vs. 13%).

MENTALISATION/AWARENESS REGARDING THE ARTWORK. A statistically significant effect of the intervention was observed in all items within the 'Mentalisation/awareness regarding the artwork' dimension, with the greatest changes seen in the items 'Regulates needs', 'Solves simple problems through evaluation of options', 'Recognises the symbolic and metaphoric content of one's own and others' creations', and 'Expresses needs; is able to articulate how much of something one has, needs, or lacks/remains' (Figure 7).



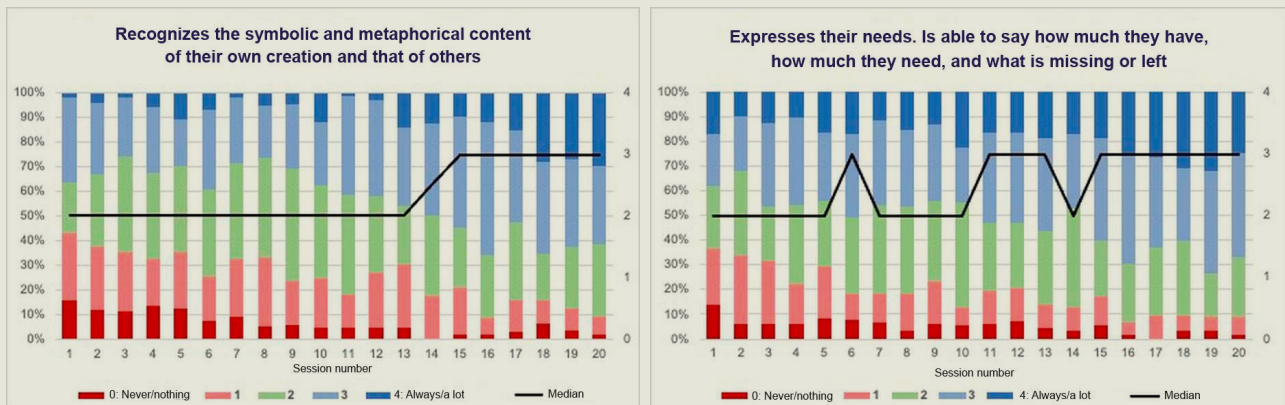
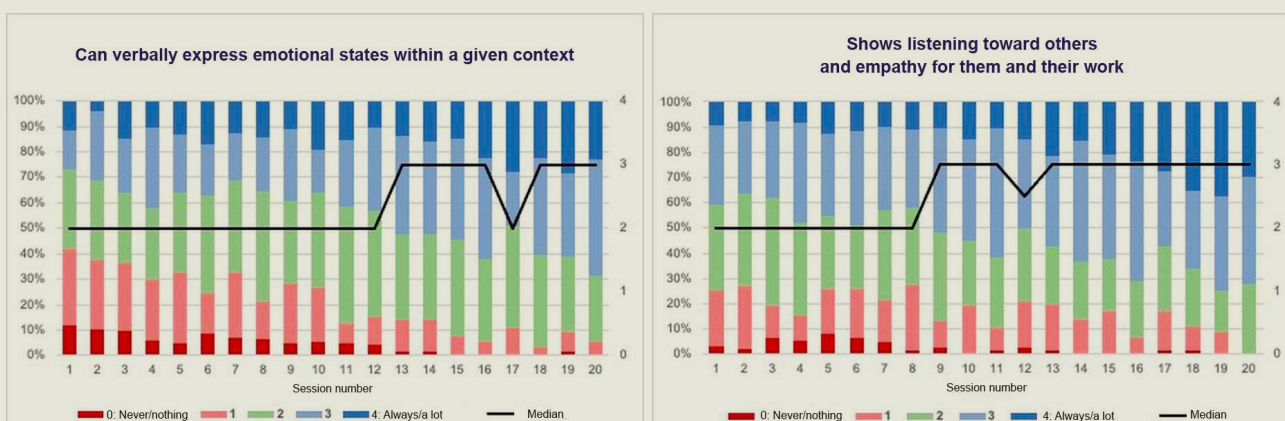


Figure 7. Effect of the program on the items “Regulates needs”, “Solves simple problems through evaluation of options”, “Recognises the symbolic and metaphoric content of one’s own and others’ creations”, and “Expresses needs; is able to articulate how much of something one has, needs, or lacks/remains”.

In the stratified analysis by academic year, a generally larger effect size is observed in 2022–2023, with the greatest differences in the items “Recognises the symbolic and metaphoric content of one’s own and others’ creations” (19% vs. 10%), “Understands concepts related to workshop development appropriate to age”, and “Understands cause-effect relationships”.

RELATIONSHIP WITH PEERS. A statistically significant effect of the intervention was observed in all items within the “Relationship with Peers” dimension. The items with the greatest effect include “Can verbally express emotional states within a given context’, ‘Demonstrates listening and empathy towards others and their work’, ‘Can express viewpoints and opinions and maintain them in debate, and ‘Includes others and their suggestions in team/group performance’ (Figure 8).



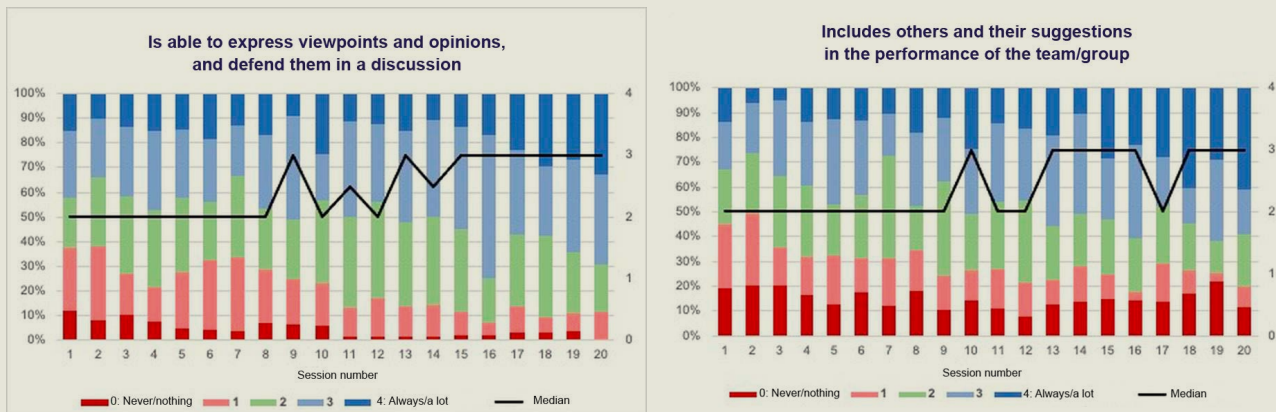


Figure 8. Effect of the program on the items 'Regulates needs', 'Solves simple problems through evaluation of options', 'Recognises the symbolic and metaphoric content of one's own and others' creations', and 'Expresses needs; is able to state how much of something one has, needs, or lacks/remains'.

In the stratified analysis by academic year, a larger effect size is observed in 2022–2023 for the items 'Can verbally express emotional states within a given context' (21% vs. 15%), 'Demonstrates listening and empathy towards others and their work', and 'Requests help/ideas/materials from other group members when necessary' (16% vs. 8%). Conversely, for the item 'Speaks within the group during initial rounds', the increase is slightly higher in 2023–2024 (2% vs. 8%).

RELATIONSHIP WITH ART THERAPIST/FACILITATOR. In the dimension 'Relationship with art therapist/facilitator', there is a 10% increase in the item 'Maintains a collaborative attitude', along with a decrease in the negative item 'Depends on the therapist's degree of acceptance' (Figure 9).

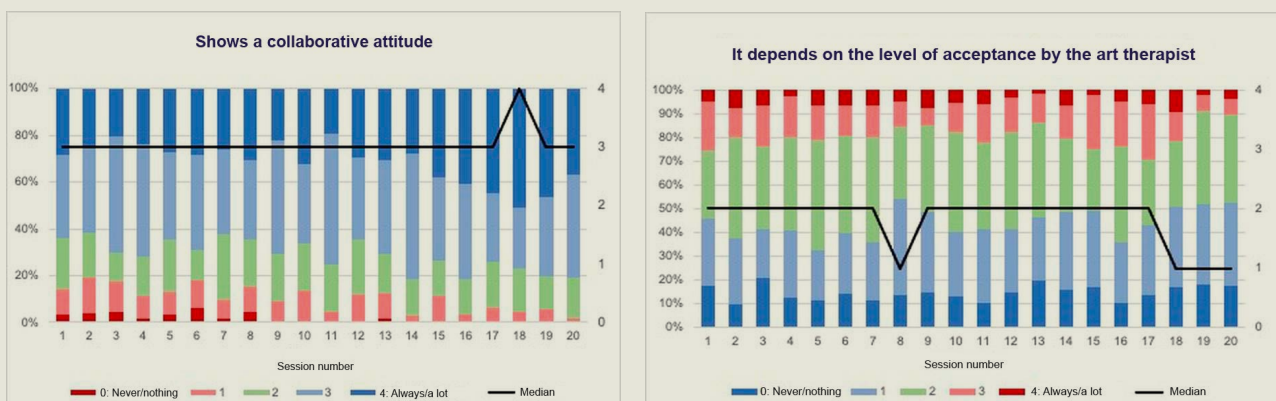


Figure 9. Effect of the programme on items of the dimension 'Relationship with art therapist'.

In the stratified analysis by academic year, a slightly greater effect is observed in 2023–2024 for the item ‘Maintains a collaborative attitude’ (8% vs. 12%), whereas the negative item ‘Depends on the art therapist’s degree of acceptance’ shows an effect of similar magnitude (5% vs. 3%).

EFFECT OF THE PROGRAM OVER TIME. A statistically significant positive linear effect is observed as the program progresses, such that with each session, the overall score across all dimensions increases, with the greatest effect seen in the dimensions ‘Relationship with materials’ and ‘Mentalization’ (Table 10).

	Trend Lines	p-value	95%CI	
Nonverbal communication (median)	0.039	<0.001	0.036	0.042
Relationship with materials	0.041	<0.001	0.037	0.046
Relationship with the process	0.025	<0.001	0.022	0.028
Mentalisation (median)	0.041	<0.001	0.037	0.046
Relationship with peers	0.036	<0.001	0.031	0.041
Art Therapist relationship (median)	0.019	<0.001	0.015	0.024
Nonverbal communication (sum)	0.391	<0.001	0.359	0.424
Relationship with materials (sum)	0.320	<0.001	0.287	0.353
Relationship with the process (sum)	0.427	<0.001	0.368	0.486
Mentalisation (median)	0.567	<0.001	0.513	0.622
Relationship to peers (sum)	0.348	<0.001	0.307	0.389
Art Therapist relationship (median)	0.043	<0.001	0.034	0.052

Table 10. Estimated effect per grade for each dimension (mean score and sum score).

CATEGORIZATION OF METAPHORS. INDUCTIVE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS.

As the program progressed, girls, boys, and adolescents became conscious producers of metaphors, shaping themselves as meaning-makers through the opening of meanings that go beyond literalness and open themselves to polysemy, change, and transformation of sense. This offers possibilities for reflection, identification, discovery of meanings beyond the given, and openness to the emotion-meaning-signification relationship, as well as the search for new metaphors that, beyond helping to know how they feel or are perceived, may open up thinking and feeling about how to transform themselves and transform reality. And, beyond

our perception, to imagine a more liveable world and a community of affections. Metaphor introduces us to the realm of complexity; it helps escape dichotomies such as good/bad, acceptable/not acceptable, to enter into changes of meaning, the dismantling of stereotypes, and projection toward a liveable future. By operating in the symbolic realm, it allows discussion with peers and the art therapist about actions, strategies, emotions, and possible solutions. At the same time, it enables the indirect expression of feelings which, otherwise, would leave children and adolescents more exposed to the gaze of others.

Metaphor was introduced in the second and third years of fieldwork to stimulate the attribution of meaning from the symbolic and the establishment of relationships by girls, boys, and adolescents. We start from the hypothesis that, by supporting the construction of a broad symbolic vocabulary in children, they will be able to increase their sense of agency over reality, providing them with their own symbolic language to identify states, think through conflicts, and imagine solutions.

After the implementation of this second year, and following analysis by the art therapists, the Brundibár coordination team established general categories of identification, conflict, resolution, and transformation, which may help build each child's personal stock of meanings, which can be shared and result in open-ended meaningful narratives that can be liberating.

Based on the results found, and following as a foundation the model proposed as a result of the research in previous years by the research team and BRUNDIBAR, the results are analyzed according to the classification of metaphors into eight subcategories grouped into three dimensions or types of metaphors:

- Metaphors of identification.
- Conflict metaphors: problem, conflict, desire or mission.
- Resolution metaphors: resolution, transformation and resignification.

Three subcategories have been created:

- Description metaphor (description of identification).
- Facilitator (facilitating elements).
- Obstacle (obstacles).

Bruce L. Moon (2007), an art therapist of reference for his work on metaphors, proposes their use as a basic tool in the session. He classifies metaphors into 5 types in relation to physical characteristics:

- Visual metaphor.
- Auditive metaphor.
- Kinetic metaphor.
- Environmental metaphor.
- Therapeutic metaphor.

In our case, it is worth mentioning that the therapeutic nature of this work can be combined with all modes (visual, auditory, kinetic, environmental, etc.) as long as they serve to improve psychosocial well-being.

Based on the identified metaphors, through an inductive qualitative analysis, the following emerging categories have been added:

- Animate, living, organic metaphors (animals, people, nature- both places and elements).
- Inanimate, inorganic metaphors (objects, buildings, human-made elements).
- Formal metaphors (colour, form).
- Kinetic metaphor, action metaphor (running, flying, swimming,...).
- Quality metaphor (more complex to categorise).

GLOSSARY:

CONFLICT METAPHORS

- MDI= Description of identification.
- MFI= Metaphor of facilitative identification.
- MHI=Metaphor of hindering identification.

METÁFORAS DE CONFLICTO

- DCM=Description of the conflict.
- MCO=Hindering elements. Conflict seen as an obstacle to achieving the mission or objective.
- MCR=Enablers. Conflict that makes it easier to achieve the mission or objective.

RESOLUTION METAPHORS

- MRD=Resolution description
- MRO=Hindering elements, there is no end or solution for the conflict.
- MRF=Enablers that help to address the problem and that can be internal or external support.

We highlight only a minimal part of the results, which exemplify their symbolic richness.

METAPHOR	SUBCATEGORY	ELEMENT	CHILDREN'S NARRATIVE
Animated, lively, organic	Places	Example: a sunset with ears of corn	'We all like to be in this place when we get angry, we want to be calm' (MIF).
	Elements of nature	Example: an orange	'I could be an orange but I hate oranges, I don't like them. I'd like to hear it myself' (MIO).
	Animals	Example: a wolf	'I am a wolf because I am never alone. He is strong and protects his pack and can be petted (MIF).
	Parts of the body	Example: foot	It's like when someone takes a wrong step (MIO).
Inanimate	Objects, finished elements	Example: a ball of crumpled newspaper	'Today I am this ball and I feel like this' <i>he pulls it back over his shoulder with some depreciation</i> 'I don't want to be here, now I can't concentrate' (hinderer/MIO).
Scientific	Action	Example: dancing	'I like it because there are people dancing' (MIF).
	Modified action	Example: sunset	'Today I feel <i>sunriseset</i> as sunrise and sunset, as the beginning and the end' (MIF).

Shapes	Shapes, composition visual hierarchy	Example: crushing	'So, crushed, I feel crushed' (referring to a mass of bread dough, MIO).
		Example: empty spaces	Example: 'It's as if I have these spaces in me too and I can't do any more' (tiredness, inability to perform a task that needs to be done or to cope with the session, MIO).
	Colour	Example: blue and red	Example: 'the good one is blue and the bad one is red, I am in the middle' (MIF) .
Qualities	Superpowers	Example: being indestructible	Example: 'I would like to be indestructible' (not to suffer, not to be hurt by blows, MIF).
		Example: Intelligence	Example: 'I would like to be smart, that's my superpower, super smart' (MIF).

METAPHORS OF IDENTIFICATION

In this section, we select metaphors that offer insight into how children and adolescents use metaphors to identify their emotions, concerns, desires, characters, and aspects related to their identity. One of the main findings is the increase in the generation of metaphors of all types (auditory, visual, kinaesthetic, and spatial). It is noteworthy that narratives become longer and more fluid throughout the sessions, and greater conflict resolution emerges.

According to some reports⁷, finding emotional identification metaphors within the art therapy space reveals the emotional diversity and depth of minors in vulnerable situations. Among the most frequently appearing emotions are sadness, anguish, anger, as well as calm and joy. The materials and proposals, along with the art therapist's initial questions, provide a starting point for each individual to engage in cognitive-emotional exploration. The way these meta-

⁷ Leganés I, by Tamara González.

phors evolve throughout the sessions shows a crucial and necessary aspect of the therapeutic process and a positive indicator of intervention effectiveness.

These emotions have not only been identified but have also been shaped during the sessions. For example, anger was expressed through the body, and sadness through objects, both animate and inanimate. These results not only demonstrate the minors' increasing ability to identify their states but also show that art serves as a medium for them to explore and reconfigure their vulnerable experiences in a safe environment, to talk about them, and to organize them by giving them form, image, or symbol.



27.03.24 Session 9 CRIA LEGANÉS.

FR: 'This is the person called Isar, well, Mateo. His eyes are here, he is very different from people, he doesn't look like, he is not a person, he is a person who always has to be in a hurry and he runs a lot, you see him here there are many things here, he is in a hurry running, until he has left the grass. He's wearing a hat and that hat gives him a hurry and here is the cap.'

CONFLICT METAPHORS

Conflict metaphors allow us to observe the internal challenges and tensions faced by the minors. In general, the loss of friends, unsafe homes, the appearance of characters who destroy the most valuable things of the characters, money, illness, anger, destruction, abandonment, and mockery are themes that emerge as worrying and challenging for the minors.

24.11.24 Session. Transcript of the CRIA Leganés recording.

There is a father and a mother separated in two worlds. The mother is in the part of the warm colours and the father in the cold-colour part of the world. Then the children appear, who build a bridge to unite them. There are birds in the sky and trees all around in stripes. Title of the work: "Separated parents"



RESOLUTION METAPHORS

In the analysis of resolution metaphors, the minors' ability to generate positive endings to their stories at the end of the intervention stands out, although in several cases these resolutions are linked to further conflicts and threats (as can be seen in ambivalent and complex metaphors). However, the resilience of the minors is revealed in their capacity to imagine different symbolic solutions to conflicts, despite these bringing forth new conflicts.



Image 21 AN, and AGA, session 6 (CRIA Seville)

AN: The flooded house

AGA: 'Stich is trapped in this house and he can't get out and the house is flooding'.

AN: Isn't there any way out?

AGA: Yes, this little rescue boat can help him. (He stages how the boat pulls him out with a rope).



CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1: 'WEAVING AND RE-IMAGINING THE STORY: A GIRL'S MEMORY AND SYMBOLIC UNIVERSE CONTAINED IN HER WORK'

CRIA CENTER: Seville; **Art Therapist:** Marta Gómez; **Observer:** Mayka Sánchez

CASE CONTEXT.⁸

Elena is a 9-year-old girl, a resident of the neighbourhood where the art therapy workshop takes place and a student of the school that hosts the sessions. She has attended the sessions during 22/23 and 23/24 school years, with a very regular attendance.

Her height is somewhat above average for her age, although her spoken expression and vocabulary use show some difficulties. Her level of Spanish proficiency is relatively low considering the number of years she has been in Spain.

Her relationship with the group and facilitators has not always been positive, starting the process with a more defensive attitude. Although she struggles to express herself and integrate into the group, showing high demands on the creative process and a low tolerance for frustration, during the sessions she gradually shows more interest and shares ideas, as well as a collaborative attitude and good treatment toward others. The group itself has provided her with support and special attention in this cycle (23/24), even becoming a key figure in the games and dynamics that have naturally emerged within the group.

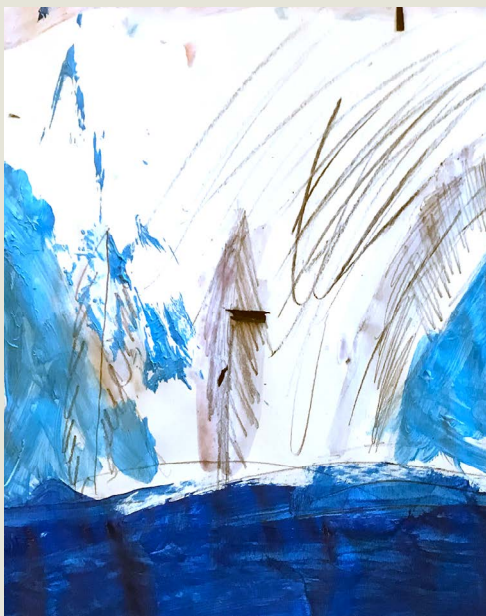
DESCRIPCIÓN DEL PROCESO Y RESULTADOS

During Elena's process, it is observed how she has been exploring and also incorporating new ways of 'doing' and presenting her ideas and her 'private craziness' to the group. In her exploration with the materials, her three-dimensional creations increase exponentially, and with that, her confidence in her own abilities grows, allowing her to express herself more genuinely and freely in the space.

⁸ In accordance with the ethical protocol of SCE and the Complutense University of Madrid, minors' personal data have been anonymised and their details have been changed to protect their privacy.

FASE 1: "CREACIÓN DE UN ESPACIO SEGURO". SESIONES 1 A 3

During the first sessions, focused on promoting a safe space, building bonds, and providing resources for containment and emotional self-regulation, in Elena's creative process, the artwork serves more as a means of release rather than as an element of identification and transformation .



"My inner landscape"

In the first session, she rejects her own work.

She expresses directly that she does not like the way her landscape has turned out and says she wants to get rid of it, although she later regrets it and decides not to do so:

E: I have made this landscape but I don't like it because it doesn't look good.

AT: Are you not satisfied with the work?

E: No, I don't like it.

AT: What do you want to do with it?

E: I don't want it.

AT: Do you want to get rid of it?

E: Yes (then she folds it in half and opens it again. Finally, she decides to keep it).

"My safe space"

In session 2, she creates, with cardboard, what she says is a pool of blood:

E: This is a pool of blood, where people can't swim because there are monsters.

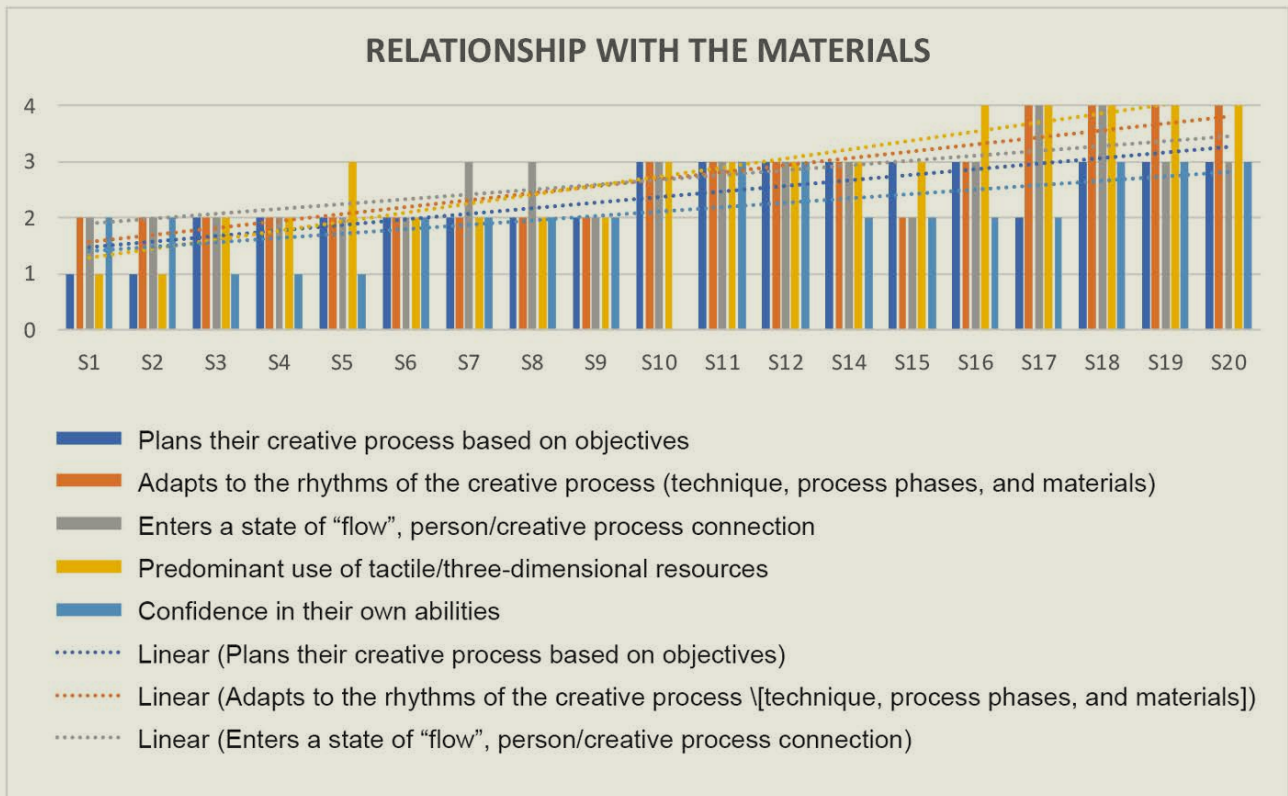
AT: Isn't it possible to bathe with the monsters?

E: No, because there is too much salt (thus pointing to a metaphor of conflict. She closes by saying) 'To be continued'.

She starts to become less frustrated and to share more with others. This interest in materials leads to a direct encounter with the Proyecta tool, which is very significant in this process.

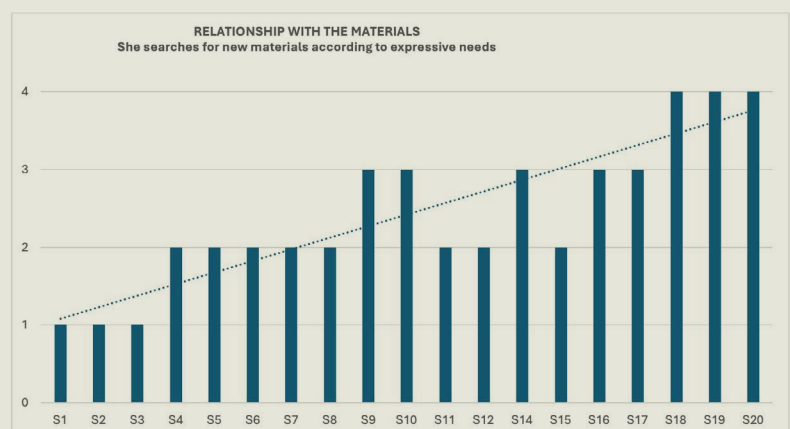


Elena's relationship with this tool is very positive; she really likes art and perceives the works by asking about details, treating them as valuable objects, giving them meaning, and exploring to learn more about them. This desire to learn new things is a constant in her process, reflected in how she handles the materials as a safe, always exciting place where she can investigate. This is shown in the following graph about this dimension and its respective observation items:



Graph Dimension "Relationship with Materials"

This is how Elena's search for new materials is encouraged based on her expressive needs:



PHASE 2: 'GROUP IDENTITY, PERSONAL IDENTITY AND COMMONALITIES' SESSIONS 4 TO 9

In this phase, focused on promoting expressive dynamics and languages that enable the recognition of the body in symbolic play and the exploration of personal and group emotions, Elena expands her creations by becoming more involved in the selection of materials.

Session 4. Mum

In session 4, she creates a gift for her mother: 'I have made this bowl for my mother and I have written her a letter with some things in it for her, because she is going on a trip and I don't know when she will be back'. Through metaphors of identification and resilience she is able to place and name her emotions and insecurity in her work.



From this session onwards, Elena begins to involve her body more directly in her creation, developing stories, symbolic games, and metaphors that greatly interest the rest of the group and will be important for the group process until the end of the intervention. She takes her works and their presentation very seriously. She creates moments of silence, and the theatricalised actions become dialogues. Sometimes what she says is not clearly heard, but the stories she generates through puppets (session 5⁹), games (session 6¹⁰), and theatrical performances (session 8¹¹), which include character creation, masks, and expressive movement, can be understood. Through these, she is able to work on aspects of exploration and others related to insecurity.



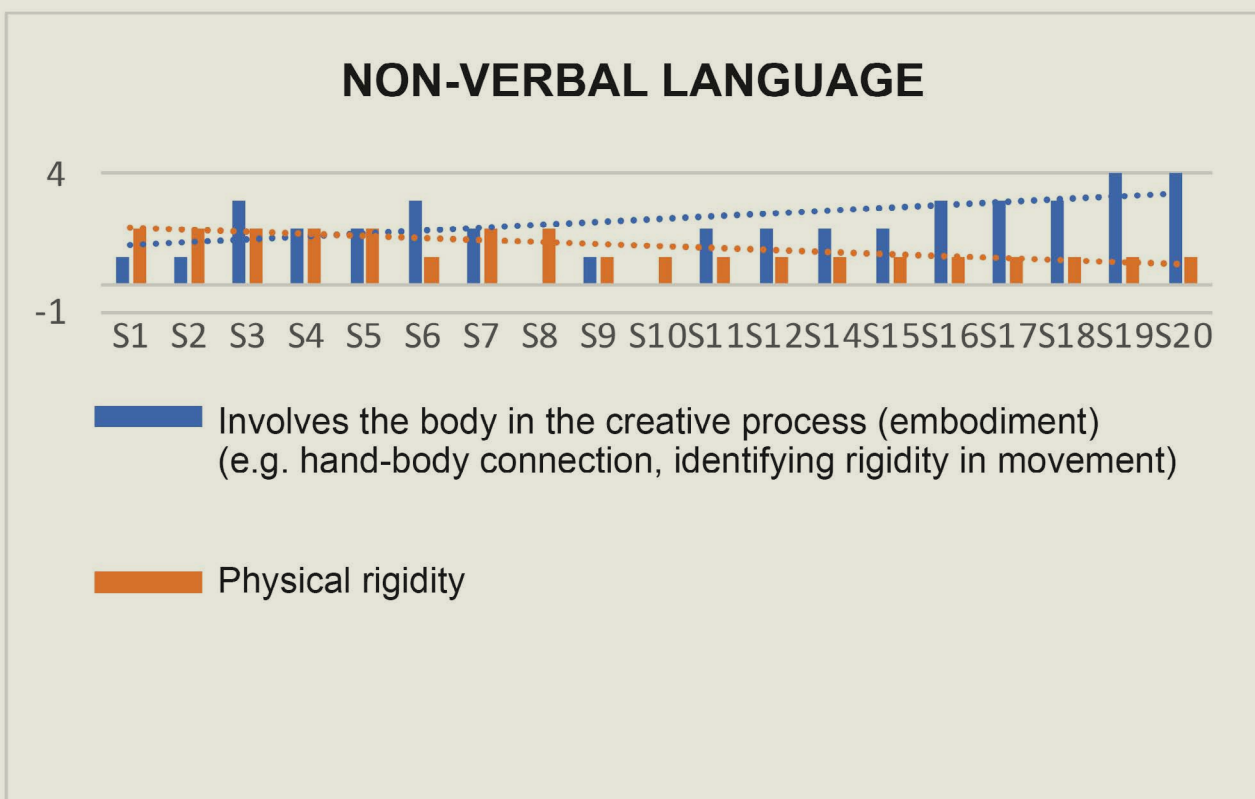
9 Proposal 'The Mystery Box I'. Title: 'To the cinema without words'. Made with blue tissue paper and a box. It represents the search of a treasure, with conversation of two characters in a very low voice.

10 Proposal 'The Mystery Box II'. Title: 'Close your eyes'. Of which she says: 'This is like an airplane with coloured papers inside that say CLOSE YOUR EYES. And what is it, a game? Yes, it's a game where you get on it and when you close your eyes, it moves'.

11 Proposal: 'Journey to an inner world'. Title: 'Journey to a new world' Theatrical staging with mask and creation of a new world through plaster, stones, coloured feathers and mould. From which she says: 'In this world that I have created, Stitch and Angela are going to celebrate a Baby shower party. And what happens in the baby shower? Today it is not going to be celebrated, it will be celebrated the next day. To be continued'.

She still finds it difficult to share, but she begins to loosen up, and it is this exploration of new materials that will allow her to express a complex moment of personal insecurity related to her mother's trip outside Spain, which she shares with the group.

It can be observed how this embodied creative work leads her to a greater capacity for symbolic understanding and increased confidence, which will allow her to process and put into words what she is feeling. These observations are complemented by the quantitative results from the analysis of nonverbal language during the creative process, showing how Elena's bodily rigidity decreases while her bodily involvement in the creative process increases:



Graph "Non-Verbal Language" dimension

PHASE 3: 'POETIC LANGUAGE. CONSCIOUS ELABORATION OF NARRATIVES AND METAPHORS'. SESSIONS 10 TO 17.

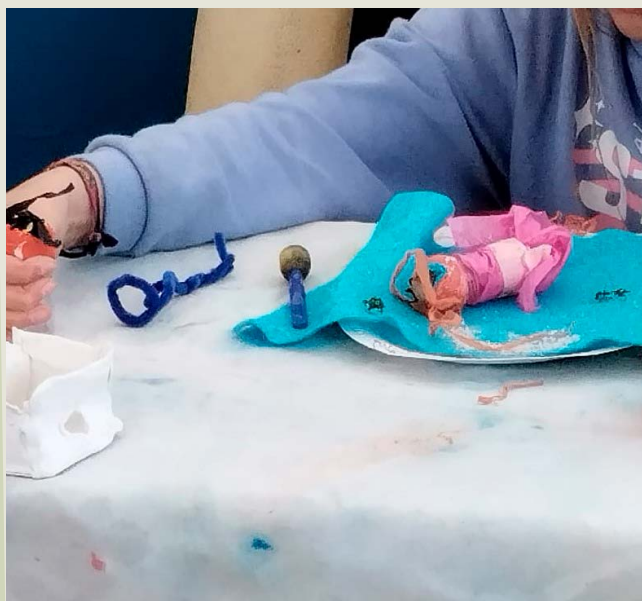
During Phase 3, focused on promoting listening to the other and awareness of different realities, finding alternative solutions to conflict and poetic narratives that give rise to emotional expression, Elena unfolds her narrative and storytelling potential, supported by the Six-Part Story Method (6PSM).

Session 11 – The mermaid and the sea

In session 11, under the proposal ‘I know how to tell stories’ Elena, accompanying the story with a theatrical staging, tells us:

E: Once upon a time there was a mermaid who lived in the sea, but she went to live with a prince and she was no longer the same. She was so sad that one day a very strong wave came and took her away. When that happened, she went with the wave, held on in the sea and went home again.

In addition to the usual metaphors of identification and resilience, there are metaphors of resolution for these conflict situations that sometimes involve dialogue, as will be seen in the next sessions.



Thus, this game between the symbolic-theatrical and the narrated-scripted contents allows her to deal with emotionally complex themes, such as that of ‘The girl footballer’: ‘A girl who had to endure many insults because they wouldn’t let her play football. This is how she defended herself’. And she stages a conversation between the girl and the people who insulted her.



Session 13. ‘The artists’ museum’.

In session 13, in the post-test session ‘My Museum’, Elena continues to explore the world that artists and their works offer her. This time she chooses the works “Artistin” (Marzella) by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1909), “The Return of the Dove” by John Everett, and “Millais and Little Night Serenade” by Dorothea Tanning. With them, Elena creates her own museum, and says:

E: This museum that I have created is free for everyone and anyone can enter. While you learn a story that I am going to tell through the paintings, you can eat special food and typical sweets. First, I will give you some TAKES, typical of my country. Now I will tell you the story of a little girl who was sad but then something happened at home and finally she started to play, met her mother and felt better’.

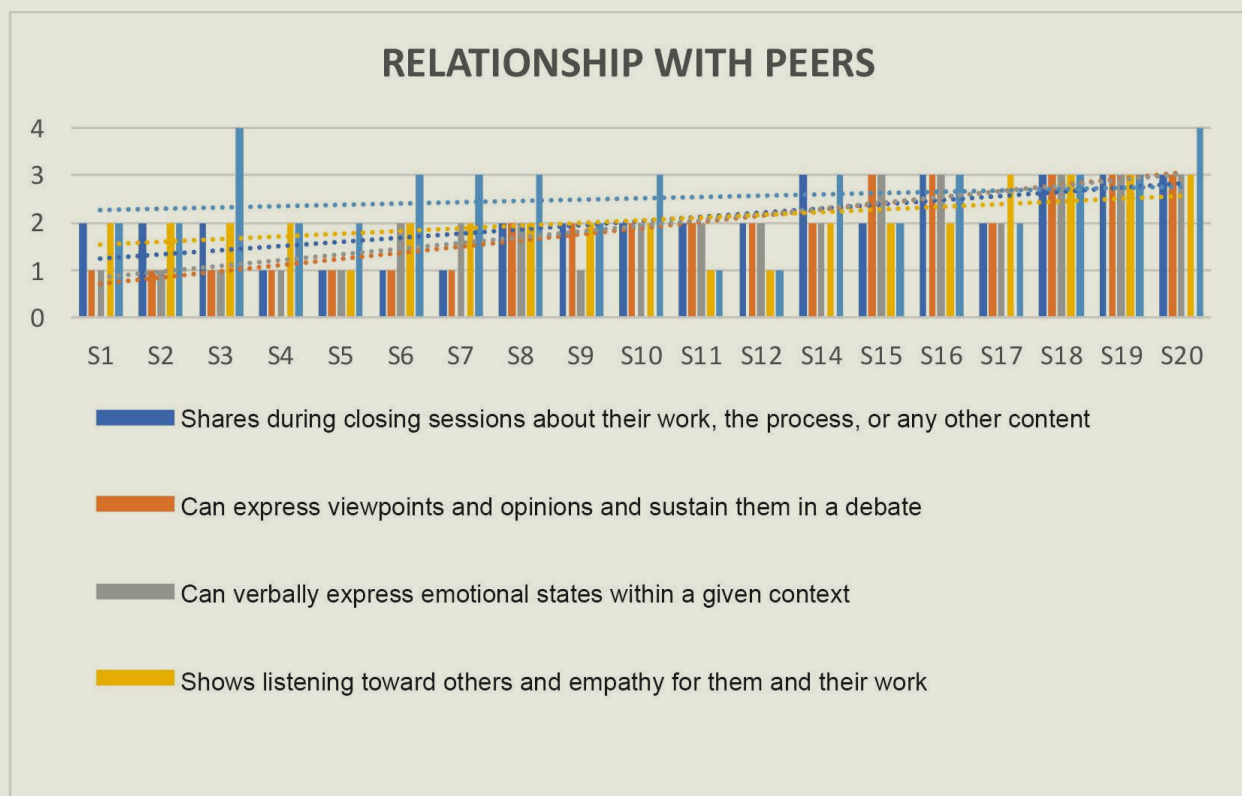
Through the creation of stories, her country, her mother, herself and her inner world are embodied and consolidated as protagonists in the art-therapeutic space.

It is observed how, in Elena’s process, the idea of a museum is symbolically integrated as just another creative material, through the constant aesthetic appreciation of artworks within the

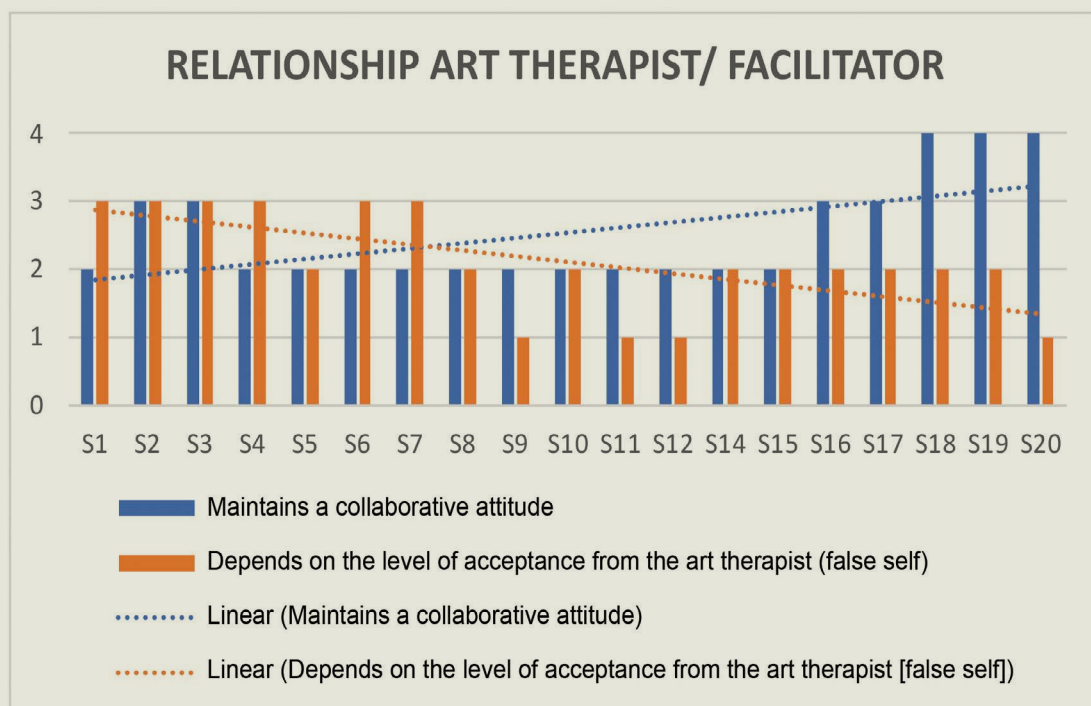
art therapy space. Thus, it becomes a personal inner and symbolic space, which is continued through visits to cultural spaces included in the intervention and later reinforced in the sessions. That gaze, which little by little turns and focuses inward, becomes evident in the closing phase.

PHASE 4: 'FAREWELL AND CLOSING'. SESSIONS 18 TO 20.

In this final phase, which begins with the proposal 'The Final Scene,' the aim is symbolic integration, encompassing a gathering of all that has been experienced and shared. Elena mainly opts for the representation of narratives rather than symbolic play, focusing more on the script of the dialogues than on creating an object or character. Regarding her relationship with peers, her communication with all of them and the way she connects with them improve significantly, as reflected in all the items included in this dimension:



Although the group dynamics improve, it seems relevant in this case to pay attention to the role of the relationship with the art therapist, as well as the design she makes of the specific proposals throughout the overall process, considering the methodological design of the project. These seem to have allowed Elena a progressive independence until she finds an internal safe place of support and containment, fostering self-regulation and her own symbolic expression. This, in turn, enables her to present herself to others with listening and a collaborative attitude, as reflected in the graph. From the world to the group, from the group to the self. And back to the group and the world:



Session 19 – ‘A dress created by me’

Thus, ‘A dress created by me’, is the final closing work of the process that she makes in session 19 and of which she says: E: I have created this purple dress to wear whenever I want. Metaphors of identification and resilience appear, which she appropriates through her creation, thus honouring the creative process and creating a kind and inspiring perspective of the future through the rituals of closing and celebration of the art-therapeutic process, such as the last session with the families, in which they are the protagonists.



CONCLUSIONS.

Throughout the entire creative process, it becomes evident that Elena mainly chooses the embodied representation of narratives, in which the symbolic load progressively increases: language and the bonds between people and their cultures become present, accompanied by a huge projective load concerning the customs of her family's country of origin and issues related to femininity.

Free creation and art in general have been for Elena a complicit agent to support her self-esteem when carrying out a project or communicating an idea to the group. She has felt understood and heard, which has allowed her to involve her body more—and with it, her voice—in the creative process.

Everything she has symbolically overcome through creation has led her to calm down regarding the negative mental rumination she seemed to have been enduring for many years. In art therapy, she appears to have overcome many barriers this year, all related to feeling blocked when she believes something will not turn out as she thinks or expects. The initial anxiety that anything caused her has decreased in the last sessions.

In this whole process, metaphors have had a specific function, moving from initial identification and resilience to confronting insecurity and seeking, complex emotional expression, and conflict resolution.

At the close of the intervention, she demonstrated this by carefully choosing her works to share with families. However, in this final space, she hesitated somewhat and spoke very little. In the group, she is capable of achieving great goals, but in audiences such as families, she feels overwhelmed. Thus, objectives for continuity in her personal work and process appear—challenging goals for which she already has the tools of art.

CASE STUDY 2: 'WEAVING AND RE-IMAGINING THE STORY: A GIRL'S MEMORY AND SYMBOLIC UNIVERSE CONTAINED IN HER WORK'.

CRIA CENTRE: Illescas; **Art Therapist:** Camila Cooper; **Observer:** Marco Maldonado

CONTEXTUALIZACIÓN DEL CASO

B¹² is an 18-year-old adolescent who attends the sessions seeking a space to express herself and strengthen her processes through plastic arts. Having participated in the previous year

¹² Is linked to the centre exclusively through the art therapy sessions, so the information we handle does not come from the professionals but from her during the process.

(22/23), she seems very happy with the restart of the sessions and verbalizes having many ideas to begin her art therapy process, yet experiences difficulties putting them into words and sharing them.

She is an important member of the group, resonating with her peers and offering them a caring gaze full of humor. It is also observed how, throughout the process, she transforms her work into a way to give voice to her life story and to reframe moments or emotions experienced with greater difficulty.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS AND RESULTS

During B's process, it seems relevant to observe the importance of the construction of the safe space in the workshop setting, as well as the strengthening of the link with the reference figures as well as with the participants, and how this has been able to facilitate the process of symbolisation and putting into words what is being elaborated in relation to her works and personal experiences.

FIRST MOMENT: 'I KNOW IT, BUT I'M NOT GOING TO SAY IT'. SESSIONS 1 TO 6.

A SAFE SPACE FOR NAMING.

B seems to need time. In the first session, she mentions that she had already thought of a script for her work and creates a collage about it. Although she appears very determined in the doing, she says she doesn't feel confident enough to talk about what the work is about. It is observed, and B verbalizes, that in this initial phase of the process, she does not feel secure enough to put into words the different symbolic processes contained in her works.

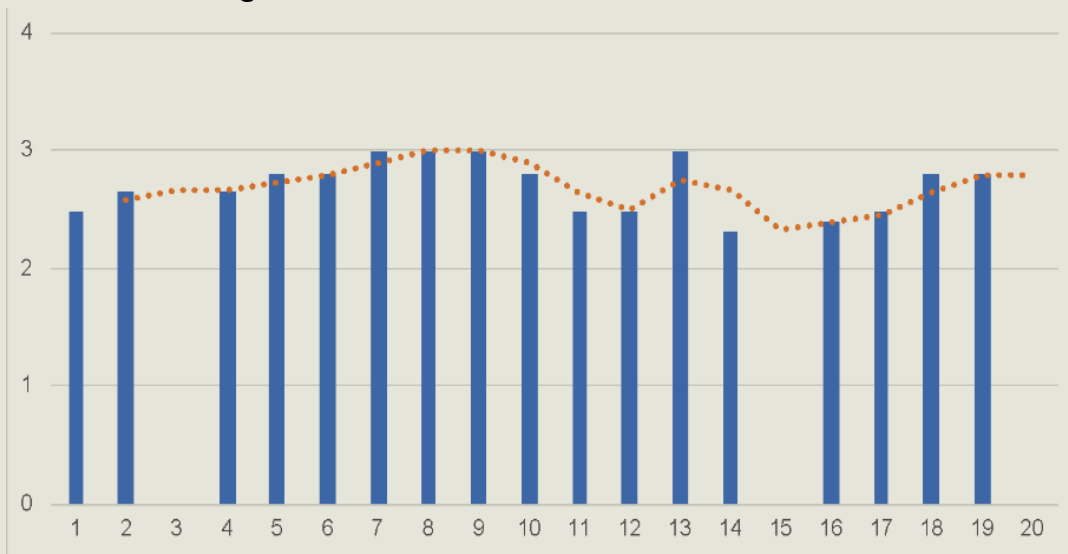
Session 1(28.11.2023).

B: I would like to devote myself to cinema. By making collages I put ideas of what I want to do on paper. At the moment I don't feel comfortable saying what it's going to be about because I'm confused about what I want to do.



However, as the sessions progress and the group consolidates, along with the previously established bond, these processes begin to come to light. In the following sessions, after creating, she struggles to share. It feels like she wants to, but can't.

That initial difficulty will gradually transform through conversations and writings, but will sometimes remain throughout the process, as shown by the variations in the following graph related to verbalizations at the end of the sessions, although we will see that her sharing becomes brave and meaningful:



Graph item 'she shares in the closings about her work or the process'.



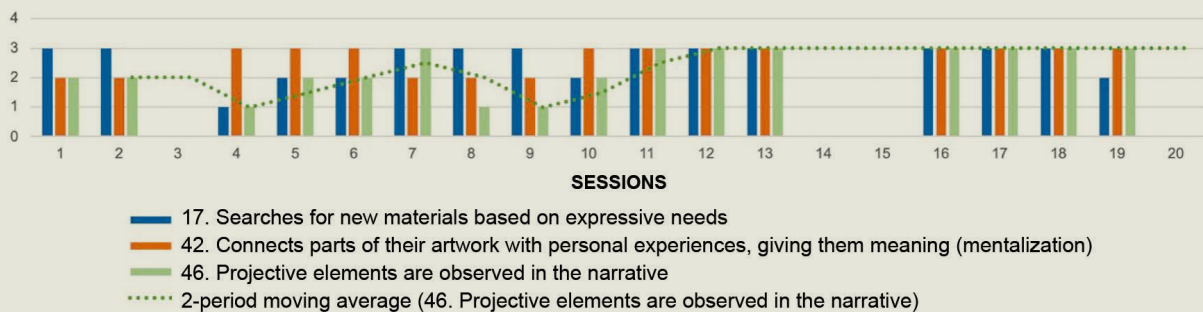
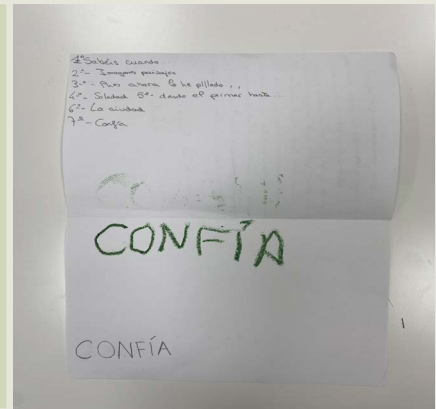
Session 4 (09.01.2024) 'Naming loneliness'.

It is in session 5 when the user can begin to develop narratives from a more personal point of view, verbalising her fear of loss and loneliness, a word with which she identified in the previous session. As she does not know what she is going to do, she is suggested to create in Stop Motion, as a technique that can facilitate the transmission of what she thinks and the projects she has in mind. She resolves the scene with cut-outs in five minutes and, through writing, she explains:
B: It is about a girl who loses her father and from this she makes a decisive change of city and life, after which she manages to create a new reality for herself and transform it into a positive experience.

From her own work she speaks of this loneliness, of fear and of all the tools that are available to face situations of loss and fear, among them confidence, with which she closes her work. She begins to give shape to the different processes of mentalisation and projection in relation to her plastic productions.

Session 5 (16.01.2024)

As the connection between what happens to her and her works increases, the elements that had previously been present in her works take shape, and life and work cross over simultaneously, as is also reflected in the graphs in relation to the creative process dimension:



Graph dimension 'creative process'.

At the end of session 6, the voiceover of her stop motion says: 'Dad, in the end I found myself. Since you left, I have been very sad. I moved out and found it-I found my best friends, who helped me from the very beginning. I would have loved for you to meet my partner, the love of my life. You would have liked him a lot; you share so many things. Sometimes I feel that your pure soul has been reincarnated in him. Thank you for teaching me and taking care of me. See you in the afterlife, Dad.' She thus delves into the fear and fantasy of losing her father.

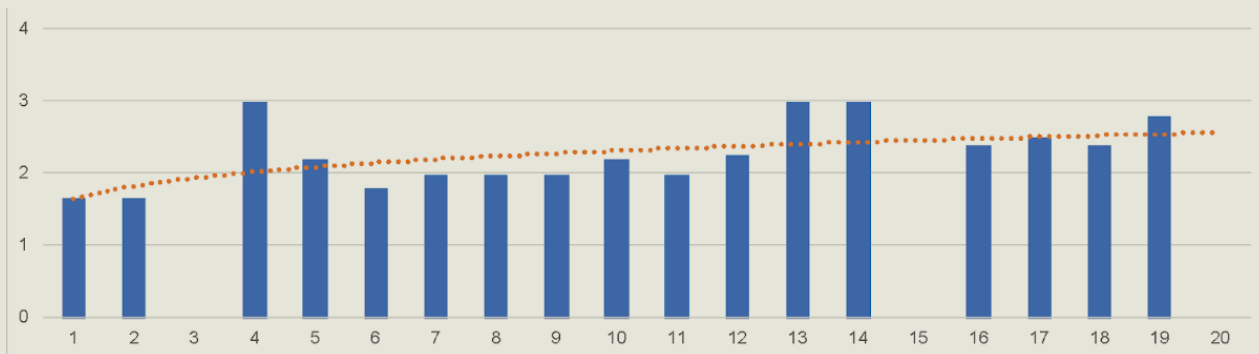
SECOND MOMENT: "A SHORT BREAK". SESSIONS 7 TO 9. 'GOING AWAY TO RETURN



Without completely distancing herself, B makes clear her need for space. In session 9, she creates the following work and says about the character portrayed that she is a girl who feels tired and nervous. The body is small and thin to support such a large head. On the stomach, a spiral represents nervousness.

SESSION 9 (13.02.2024). Without having apparently thought about that head-body relationship, B finds meaning in the difficulty of a small body supporting so many worries. At this moment in the session, the girl seems to connect with herself but immediately creates a distancing. When writing at the end, she moves away from the story and places it in the context of a woman who is forced to marry and therefore has to make henna drawings on her hands. When asked about her own relationship with the theme and the artwork, she completely distances herself and cannot identify any personal element.

This apparent need to take a step back in terms of identification is also reflected in the following graph



Graph item 'She relates part of her work to what is happening to her (mentalisation)'.

THIRD MOMENT: "I CAN NOW CONTINUE". SESSIONS 10 TO 18

'Naming the unnameable'

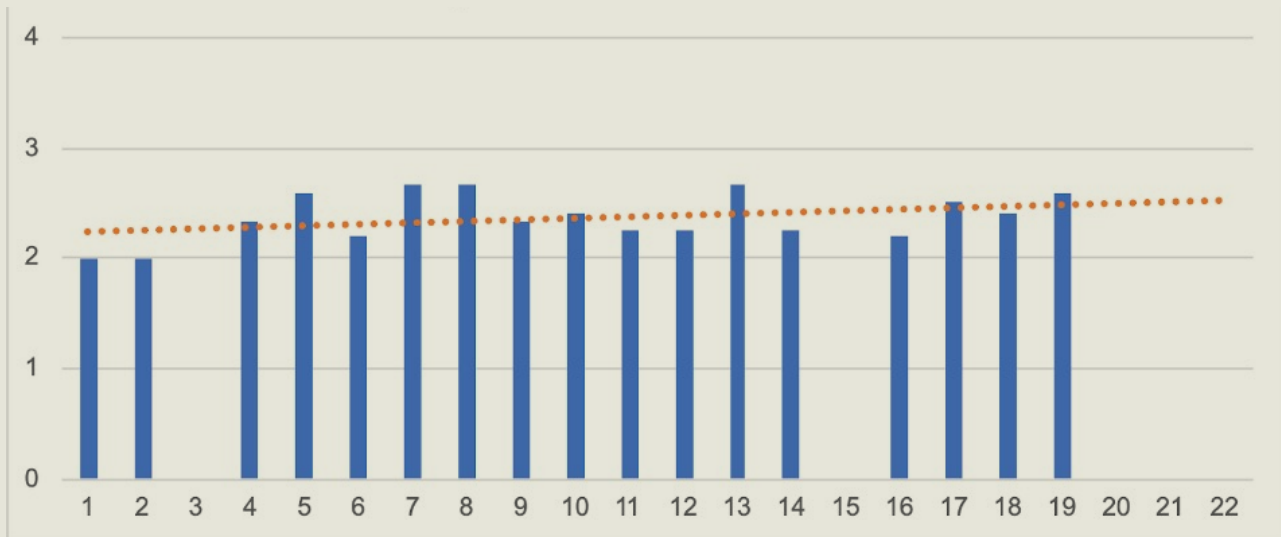
In session 10, B rescues the work from the previous session to intervene on it. She puts a few drops of red on it, but when she looks at it, she doesn't like the way it has turned out. She talks with the art therapist about what we don't like about ourselves that is also there and the possibility of giving it a place.

After this intervention, B generates a second work that has to do with things that calm her down: a character with earphones on, a rainbow, some songs and other things that calm her down.

By talking about both works in parallel and asking what they have in common, anger is named as something that is present but avoided or escaped by means of these elements of evasion. She is invited to appropriate this and to reflect on it and decides, in the closing, to make a performance. Breaking up the work of anger, she says: "I've been at ease".



This possibility of creating and naming what is difficult for her is reflected in the following graph, in which, although there are ups and downs, the tendency is to gradually verbalise how she feels:



Graph item: 'She can verbally expose emotional states'.

AMBIVALENCE.

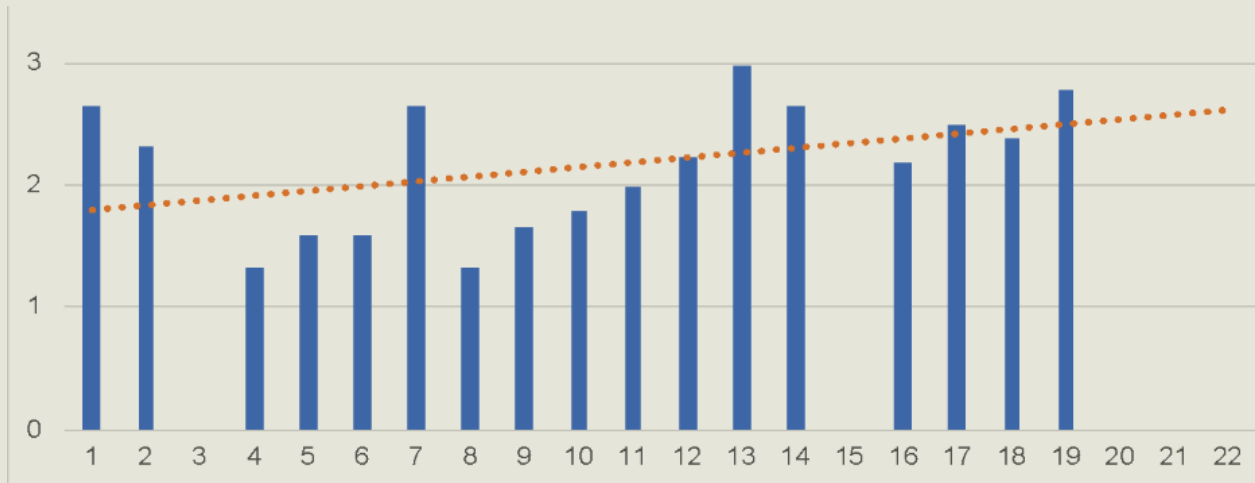
Alongside this emerging discontent, another arises related to identity and the life stage B is in—one where she must begin to separate from her parents. In session 11, she writes:

Monotony, the worst feeling. It drags melancholy, the desire to be someone else, to have other habits, to have other friends, another job, another hobby, another family, to have, to have, to have, but... what if I end it all? End this routine, this internal unrest. Because it's not just me leaving, I end it for everyone, I start from zero with myself. I leave, I go somewhere where no one knows me, I begin to forget my family, especially my mother, to end. But you know... in the end I can't do anything, fear consumes me and I'll stay in my house, next to mum, here I'm safe.

It's clear that although B is dissatisfied with her current life and expresses a strong desire to move and transform her everyday existence, she ultimately chooses to remain in her current space due to the fear that the unknown can provoke.

That fear, however, keeps her rooted in her current circumstances—particularly close to her mother—which highlights a conflict between her aspirations and her need for safety. This ambivalence is especially evident in her relationship with her mother: 'begin to forget my family, especially my mother', followed shortly by: 'I'll stay in my house, next to mum, here I'm safe.'

Despite this ambivalence, projective elements begin to take shape more firmly in her creations and narratives, as shown in the following graph:

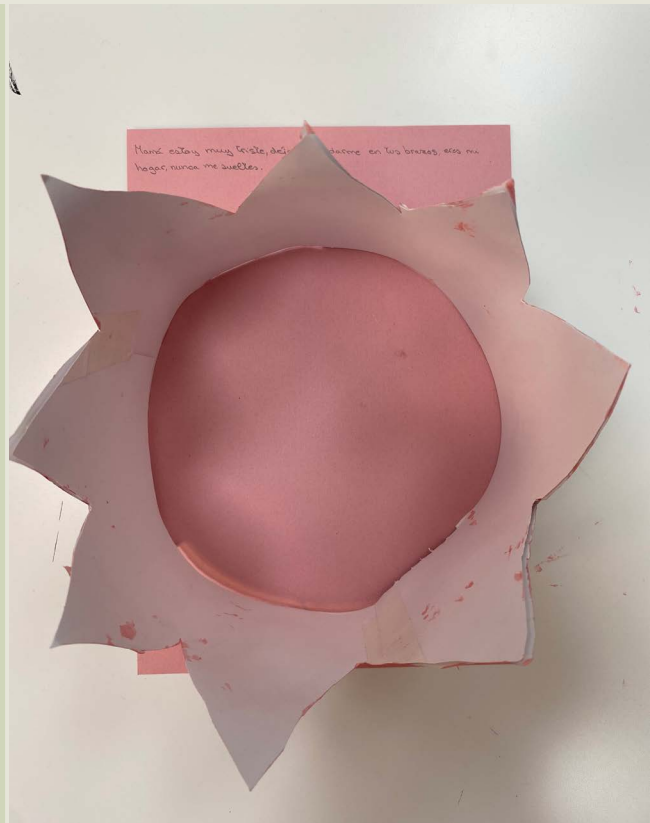


Graph item 'There are projective elements in the narrative'.

UA CROWN FOR MY CHILD: METAPHOR OF A PROCESS. SESSION 12 (05.03.2024)

In session 12 her work is a pink birthday crown that represents or symbolises the one that is given to small children at their school celebrations, and which she says she never received, as her birthday was in the summer. B says that her work symbolises looking at childhood from a nostalgic place. From this, she talks about the transition from childhood to adolescence, a change she doesn't think she was as aware of as she is now in the transition to adulthood.

Of this last transit, she says she is 'very afraid of the responsibilities that may appear and how I am going to sustain myself and resolve my existence', which is related to the concerns expressed in the previous session. In the following session, she writes for her inner child, as a gift, and stresses the importance of taking care of her and giving her what she needs.



FOURTH MOMENT: "CLOSING". SESSIONS 19 AND 20. 'MOURNING AND FAREWELLS'.

In session 19, the group begins reviewing their artworks and the overall process: key themes addressed, similarities, differences, and significant pieces. B highlights works connected to her desire to become a film director and speaks about the importance of saying goodbye to her adolescence and stepping into adulthood. She places particular emphasis on one piece: the crown.



In session 20 (07.04.2024), the last session of her process, she decides to finish it, which allows her to say goodbye to that childhood and bring the nostalgia in her relationship with her mother and her childhood to the present moment. She intermingles a piece of writing with a song, which she finds difficult to read and she becomes emotional:

B: Mum I'm so sad, let me stay in your arms, you're my home, never let me go.

Mum, wash my back while I'm sobbing. I want to be a little girl mum.

Lie next to you again, hug you from behind as I smell your hair.

Mum, make me a child again, I want to see life with illusion, with colour, with desire, with the eyes of a child.

I want to go out to the park with you again, to celebrate my birthday with my friends.

I need to put on that lost Hello Kitty t-shirt again.

I want to be a little girl again. Mum, put me the crown on my birthday.

To see the candles with the eyes of a little girl and when I look up, to see my whole family united.

Mum... could you?... Please.

At the end, we hug each other.

Thus, B closes a process in which she appears to reach a stage of development toward externalization, symbolization, mentalization, and transformation—with the artwork serving as a potential agent of change that can be used by adolescents and children, whether consciously or intuitively.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE CASE STUDY.

In the initial stage of the process, B is observed to struggle with verbalizing what is expressed in her artwork, often saying things like: 'I'll say it next time, I'll share it in the next session', and so on. However, as the sessions progress, she begins to show an ability to name and own the symbolic content developed gradually throughout the process. She starts speaking from a personal perspective, moving beyond her initial defences and emotional containment through her own unique forms, metaphors, and narratives.

The ability to speak about her emotions not only verbally, but also through her artworks—to use them as tools for transformation, or to articulate in the first person how she feels when linking them to her lived experience—demonstrates her inner capacity.

We can therefore highlight the positive development of B's ability to verbalize, listen, and show empathy toward both her peers and herself during the art therapy process. This growth can be interpreted as a reflection of the bond established among the participants and with the facilitators during the workshop, reinforcing the sense of safety within the space—so that whatever needs to be named or created can indeed be created or named. First in the artwork, and then, also, in life.



**CONCLUSIONS.
LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE**

Based on an attachment-based space as the driving force for a relationship of safety and trust, the Brundibár team has been refining its intervention strategies through action-research. This has enabled the team to adapt and be fully available to the children who have attended the art therapy workshops at Save the Children España's CRIA centres over the past two years.

In order to observe and measure the impacts and variations of the intervention, the observation recording design went through a pilot workshop in 2022–2023. This allowed, through ongoing dialogue with the art therapists facilitating the workshops¹³, a refinement of the recording tools to ensure the main changes in each child could be accurately observed. This careful, individualized, and triangulated approach after each session made it possible to collect a rich set of data on body language, the relationship with art and the creative process, the artworks produced, and the children's connections with peers and art therapists.

The records reflect a generalized improvement across all dimensions and items, indicating a positive impact of the intervention—especially in relation to materials and mentalization capacity. Improvements have been observed in non-verbal communication across all items, with particularly significant decreases in defensive postures and bodily rigidity, thus helping to modulate relationships within the space.

Regarding the creative process and its various techniques, there has been a shift toward a more abstract and complex language, along with greater self-regulation and emotional control, encouraged by moments of connection and creative flow. Similarly, within the creative process, the relationship with materials stands out—specifically, increased frustration tolerance among participants and growing enjoyment in material exploration.

In terms of mentalization and awareness of their artworks, children were able to better regulate their needs and resolve conflicts, supported by the growing emergence of symbolic and metaphorical content. This, in turn, has positively influenced peer relationships, fostering more attentive listening and empathy from a more complex perspective.

Finally, the relationship with the art therapist/facilitator has evolved, particularly regarding increased collaboration and a gradual shift toward autonomy and independence, reducing the need for external approval and enhancing self-awareness and confidence in their own abilities.

The subtlety in the use of metaphor has also been tested: some metaphors can be described as facilitators of resolution, but they can also simultaneously point to another conflict. This methodology through narrative and metaphorical language allows us to legitimate emotions

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and feelings in a context of exchange and group reflection, which acts as a metaphor for being and existing in the world. Thanks to the therapeutic intervention, children are able to generate narratives that are not only kinder, and more resolute, full of elements of support and resilience, but by providing children with artistic spaces and tools (Lüsebrink, 1990, in Malchiodi 2020) they can approach their emotional and inner world, identify the thoughts and emotions emerging in their body (Van der Kolk, 2015) and be able to reinterpret them and rewrite constructive, empowering and emancipating experiences. The evolution of these narratives throughout the sessions evidences the positive impact of the art therapy intervention on the emotional development and the children's capacity to resolve their internal conflicts.

The inclusion of the Six-Part Story Method in the Brundibár methodology has been articulated with the other methodological strategies—the attention to metaphor, the relationship with the subject matter through the exploration of different materials and techniques for creation—which explains the diversity and richness of application during the intervention programme with the groups. By dividing a story into six parts (main character in a setting; a task for the protagonist; the identification of obstacles; the identification of helping factors; the description of the climax of the story; and the description of the consequences) the participants can analyse the key elements of their experiences, identify patterns and generate new perspectives that contribute to their personal and emotional development.

The verbalisation and communication of personal narratives to the art therapist and the group, while not necessarily conducive to alternative resolutions to those given or foreseen, give voice to relational realities, to ways of understanding life scenarios and to strategies understood as necessary in certain circumstances. In turn, the transformation of the narratives towards others that are more emancipatory, conciliatory and of future vital projection, in which the characters receive or give help, can take it and transform their reality, as well as broaden their perspective towards a more communitarian outlook. The methodology offers possibilities for listening, dialogue and therapeutic interventions that promote changes in the perception and self-perception of these stories, emotional expression and an alternative and healthier identification.

The implementation of the Proyecta tool has led to a direct link with the works of art, not only with the creative process, but also in understanding artistic works as vehicles for personal reflection and social dignification. The appropriation by the children in their processes has allowed them to recognise, express and channel positive and negative emotions, and beyond all this, to legitimise these emotions and feelings in a context of exchange and group reflection, which acts as a metaphor for being and existing in the world.

We conclude that art and images in art serve as extensions of the self—mirrors in which one can feel seen and reflected, safe spaces for projection and naming of lived experiences, and as catalysts for personal creative processes. In other words, they allow for the elaboration and transformation of internal images into others that are communicable to others and the world, and that can become part of culture as a space for encounter and inclusion—even from suffering and from what is difficult to articulate.

This is directly linked to the role played by the relationship with museums and cultural institutions. All groups participated in a guided visit to a museum or cultural space.

If we accept that works of art can function as potential images (López Fdz. Cao, 2020), then museums—containers of these works—can be activated as agents to legitimize the effects of trauma and situations of vulnerability in children and adolescents, situated between the private/personal and the public/political spheres (Ibid.).

This is evidenced in the analysis of the charts and data, which align with what neuroscience has identified as features of the creative process: sensoriality, perception, affect (emotionality), cognition, and symbolic language. The analysis of the intervention highlights that the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) model (Kagin & Lusebrink, 1978) acts as a regulatory and reparative tool in the face of trauma. Through the integration of its three levels, ETC enables metric experimentation through the senses and bodily movement, connecting these experiences with emotional states, and ultimately giving symbolic and narrative meaning to the creative process (Malchiodi, 2012).

SCOPE AND FUTURE.

The results conclude that the effective integration of art therapists—trained professionals in both psychotherapy and artistic creation—into the working teams, as well as the coordination strategies aimed at achieving both group and individualized goals in collaboration with them, have been highlighted by professionals as a valuable resource that enhances the scope of intervention within the CRIA centers.

It is hoped that this report will help activate the necessary policies and actions to establish art therapy as a recognized tool for the protection of minors. This would enable children and adolescents to become protagonists of their own life and recovery processes, and—through the construction of personal narratives and supported creative work—to imagine for themselves a possible and livable future.



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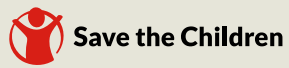
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