How Art Making Informs Meaning-Making in Service-Learning

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Service-learning is a pedagogy where “students participate in mutually identified service activities that benefit the community, and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content…” (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 221). Most service-learning literature emphasizes cognitive reflection but many students also need opportunities for emotional processing of service-learning experiences (Kiely, 2005).

Our presentation explores the role of visual art making to aid reflection and integrate the emotions experienced in service-learning through the perspectives of four graduate art therapy students who participated in service-learning and reflective art making in an introductory art therapy class. The four students later used art based research methods (Rolling, 2013) to systematically examine their art processes and products and how these contributed to, or otherwise informed the meaning of service-learning to their art therapy education and practice. This presentation describes the service-learning assignment and art reflections, the art based research methods used to study how art processes and products contributed to students’ learning, and recommendations for using art reflections in service-learning.