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## PARENT TRAINING IN EMPIRICAL ART THERAPY FOR PRESCHOOLERS AND SCHOOL-AGE KIDS WITH AUTISM

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**Background:** Evidence of improved outcomes with empirical art therapy has placed the effective intervention as a supportive treatment for Autistic kids. However, due to the shortage of therapists, long waiting lists for treatment often preclude timely access. Meanwhile, since parents are usually the closest parties with Autistic kids early life, it is desirable to offer parents proper training in the area of empirical art therapy first. This way, they can train their children, in turn, likely in self-paced manner.

**Method:** Four school-age kids (4-12 years old) with autism and their parents participating in the study. Both groups oriented and private one-on-one classes are offered bi-weekly. We also exchange teaching ideas and concrete drawing examples over text messages as needed. A multiple baseline design was used. Parents and child outcomes were assessed before, two months, 6 months, a year, two years following training using standardized tests, questionnaires and behavior monitoring directly from parental reports.

**The results:** Overall, training parents in empirical art therapy have been shown to increase ASD kids' self-expression of ideas and catharsis of personal feelings. Children's communication skills, namely functional utterances, and attention span also increased following training.

**Conclusion:** Our empirical art therapy provides parents the flexibility of schedule, enhances effective communications between parents and their ASD children. It is particularly useful for school-age children to improve their cognitive skills. Our findings allude to an immediate, cost-effective intervention that could be adopted widely.

### Biography

Rachel Jin is currently a junior at Campolindo High school in Moraga, California, USA. In 2014, she founded Autism Creativity Center, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping children with ASD learn and develop using art techniques. Currently the center has more than 20 volunteer art teachers and 30 students. Rachel had previously worked with autistic children for 2 years at Angelove Family Support Center as a volunteer.

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