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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Use Me! The Manipulation of Clay by Persons with Special Abilities

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| ABSTRACT

Creative expression is increasingly recognized as a vital medium for communication and inclusion among individuals with intellectual disabilities, particularly within contexts where verbal articulation is limited. This study examines the expressive potential of clay manipulation among individuals with intellectual disabilities, challenging long-standing societal perceptions that frame such individuals as lacking functional and creative capacities. Drawing on a qualitative research design and an art-based intervention, the study integrates case study methodology and participant observation involving selected students from Garden City Special School. Participants engaged in guided clay manipulation exercises conducted within the school environment, with the process systematically observed and analyzed. Findings indicate that, despite limitations in motor coordination and difficulties in processing complex instructions, participants were able to produce basic forms, including spheres, cylinders, trapezoids, and rudimentary humanoid figures when provided with simplified guidance and structured support. The tactile and adaptable nature of clay, combined with incremental instruction, enabled participants to engage meaningfully in the creative process. The study demonstrates that, with minimal but targeted assistance, individuals with intellectual disabilities can utilize clay as a medium for self-expression, thereby fostering a sense of agency and personal fulfilment. These findings underscore the importance of inclusive creative practices and suggest that art-based interventions can serve as valuable tools for enhancing the well-being and social integration of persons with intellectual disabilities.

| KEYWORDS

Clay, Intellectual Disability, Motor Skills

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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INTRODUCTION

In a symbolic parallel to Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, the journey of artistic expression may be understood as a process of discovery, adaptation, and access. In the narrative, the protagonist encounters a bottle labelled "DRINK ME" and keys that enable her to navigate otherwise inaccessible spaces, each representing transformation and entry into new realms. Within the context of artistic practice, these elements can be interpreted metaphorically: the "key" signifies the medium through which expression becomes possible, while the transformative act symbolizes the adaptation required to engage meaningfully with the art world. Drawing from this analogy, the concept of "Use Me" is advanced in this study as a framework to understand how participants with intellectual disabilities can explore, manipulate, and express themselves through art, positioning the material, the researchers, and the participants as mutually responsive agents in the creative process.

This conceptual framing becomes especially relevant when considering individuals with intellectual disabilities, whose access to artistic expression is often limited not by absence of ability, but by lack of opportunity and appropriate mediums. Intellectual disability has been widely examined within medical, educational, and social frameworks as a condition affecting both cognitive functioning and adaptive behaviour.

The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disability[1] defines it as a disability characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning such as reasoning, learning, and problem-solving and in adaptive behaviour, which includes a range of everyday social and practical skills. Similarly, Addo describes intellectual disability (ID) as a diminished ability to understand new or complex information, acquire new skills, and live independently, with onset before adulthood and long-term developmental implications[2]. These limitations are primarily behavioural in nature and typically manifest before the age of 18[3], often presenting through difficulties in memory, linking actions to consequences, logical reasoning, and behavioural regulation, including impulsive or explosive responses.[4]

Beyond clinical definitions, intellectual disability intersects with broader societal constructs that shape how individuals are perceived and treated. Notions of "normality" and "abnormality" continue to influence social attitudes, often reinforcing exclusionary practices. As Shaikh argues, the expectation that individuals conform to rigid societal norms undermines the inherent diversity of human experience[5]. Consequently, individuals with intellectual disabilities are frequently marginalized and defined primarily by their limitations rather than their capacities. Nyatefe observes that such individuals are often perceived as dependent or burdensome, rather than as persons capable of meaningful contribution[6]. While some individuals with severe intellectual disabilities may require sustained support, it is equally critical to acknowledge that many of the barriers they face are socially constructed, arising from persistent stigmatization and restricted access to enabling environments.

These challenges are further compounded within institutional and healthcare contexts. Studies indicate that persons with intellectual disabilities (PWIDs) frequently depend on third-party assessments to identify and respond to health conditions, increasing the risk of misdiagnosis and delayed care[7]. This phenomenon of "diagnostic overshadowing,"), further illustrates how physical health issues may be overlooked or misattributed to intellectual disability[8], Fiaku similarly highlights how individuals with autism are often misunderstood and incorrectly categorized as mentally ill, reinforcing negative stereotypes and inappropriate institutional responses[9]. Collectively, these findings underscore the extent to which stigma operates across multiple dimensions of life, limiting both recognition and opportunity.

Within the creative arts, however, alternative pathways for inclusion and expression have begun to emerge. The twentieth century saw increased recognition of artistic production by individuals outside formal academic traditions, leading to the classification of "raw art"[10]. Despite this shift, persons with intellectual disabilities remain underrepresented within artistic discourse. Historically regarded as objects of fear and pity, particularly in developing contexts, these individuals have often been

[1] American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), "Frequently Asked Questions on Intellectual Disability," 2020, https://www.aaidd.org/intellectual-disability/definition/faqs-on-intellectual-disability.
[2] D. Addo, "Barriers and Facilitators to Healthcare Access for People with Intellectual Disability (PWIDs) in the Ashanti Region of," *KNUST Space*, 2019.
[3] Oti-Boadi, "Challenges and support needs of parents of children with developmental disabilities (DD) in Accra, Ghana," 2015, cited in D. Addo, "Barriers and Facilitators to Healthcare Access for People with Intellectual Disability (PWIDs) in the Ashanti Region of," *KNUST Space*, 2019.
[4] Center for Parent Information and Resources, "Intellectual Disability," 2017; American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), "Frequently Asked Questions on Intellectual Disability," 2020; World Health Organization (WHO), "Definition: Intellectual Disability," 2020; M. N. A. Thompson, "The Use of Drawing and Painting in Developing Fine Motor Skills among Learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities at Dzorwulu Special School in Accra," 2019.
[5] T. Shaikh, "Are We Abnormally Normal?" *HuffPost*, January 3, 2015.
[6] E. Nyatefe Joshua, *ABC Portraits: An Experience with Intellectually Disabled Persons* (unpublished project report, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana, 2018).
[7] G. L. Krahn, L. Hammond, and A. Turner, "A Cascade of Disparities: Health and Health Care Access for People with Intellectual Disabilities," *Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews* 12 (2006): 70–82; A. Alborz, R. McNally, and C. Glendinning, "Access to Healthcare for People with Learning Disabilities: Mapping the Issues and Reviewing the Evidence," *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy* 10, no. 3 (2005): 173–182, cited in D. Addo, "Barriers and Facilitators to Healthcare Access for People with Intellectual Disability (PWIDs) in the Ashanti Region of," *KNUSTSpace*, 2019.
[8] Addo, "Barriers and Facilitators to Healthcare Access."
[9] D. Fiaku, *We Can Self-Express – A Painting Exploration with Intellectually Disabled Persons* (unpublished project report, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana, 2020).
[10] D. Fiaku, *We Can Self-Express – A Painting Exploration with Intellectually Disabled Persons* (unpublished project report, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana, 2020).

excluded from narratives of creativity and artistic agency[11]. Yet evidence suggests that many possess unique and meaningful modes of expression, particularly through non-verbal and material-based practices. Art, in this sense, becomes not merely an aesthetic endeavour but a communicative and emancipatory tool.

It is within this broader context that questions emerge regarding the artistic potential of individuals with intellectual disabilities: What mediums can effectively facilitate their expression? How do they engage with and manipulate artistic materials such as clay? To what extent can such engagement support both creative and developmental outcomes? Addressing these questions requires a shift from deficit-oriented perspectives toward an exploration of capability, process, and interaction.

Clay, as an artistic medium, presents a particularly compelling site for such exploration. Its global availability, malleability, and tactile qualities make it accessible to individuals across varying levels of ability. Scholars such as Dokyoung, Ahuwan, and Danborno and Hansen emphasize its expressive and therapeutic potential, noting that clay enables the externalization of internal experiences through physical manipulation[12]. Leach further asserts that artistic creations reflect the emotional and psychological states of their makers[13]. Beyond expression, clay-based activities have been shown to reduce anxiety, enhance mood, stimulate creativity, and support trauma recovery, while also contributing to the development of fine and gross motor skills.[14]

The relevance of clay becomes even more pronounced when considered alongside the motor and cognitive characteristics associated with intellectual disability. Individuals with such conditions often experience challenges in coordination, communication, and task execution[15], stemming from limitations in cognitive processing and resulting in motor delays[16]. Given that effective movement depends on the integration of neurological and muscular systems, disruptions in these processes can significantly affect functional ability. Consequently, interventions that engage both sensory and motor systems such as clay manipulation offer valuable opportunities for development and expression.

Empirical studies further support the role of art-based interventions in enhancing motor skills and facilitating self-expression among individuals with intellectual disabilities. Thompson, for instance, demonstrates that activities such as drawing and painting contribute to improved fine motor coordination. Similarly, Nyatefe[17] and Fiaku[18] show that structured art-making sessions enable participants to communicate through colour and form, reinforcing the role of art as a medium of expression.

Guided by the conceptual framework of "Use Me," this study investigates how participants with intellectual disabilities actively engage with artistic materials and the researchers, positioning themselves as reciprocally engaged agents in the creative process. The study examines students at the Garden City Special School, an institution established in 1977 in Kumasi, Ghana, to support individuals diagnosed with intellectual disabilities as they explore, manipulate, and express themselves through art within a structured yet flexible environment. By foregrounding the participants' agency and reciprocal interaction with both the researchers and the materials, the study highlights their role as co-creators and addresses a critical gap in both artistic and disability scholarship.

Ultimately, this research contributes to ongoing conversations on inclusion, creativity, and material engagement by demonstrating that artistic expression among individuals with intellectual disabilities is not only possible but meaningful when supported by appropriate mediums and collaborative frameworks. Through the lens of "Use Me," clay is repositioned not merely as a material, but as an active participant in the process of expression one that enables individuals to navigate, interpret, and communicate their experiences within and beyond the boundaries imposed by societal perception.

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[11] Paul Burtner, "Society's Attitude toward People with Disabilities," University of Florida Health Science Center, April 1, 2020, https://paul-burtner.dental.ufl.edu/oral-health-care-for-persons-with-disabilities/societys-attitude-toward-people-with-disabilities/.

[12] E. E. Dokyoung, A. M. Ahuwan, and B. Danborno, "Development of an Indigenous Ceramics Bead Model 'Clay for Play' to Enhance Learning Children with Learning Disabilities," *Tropical Built Environment Journal* 1, no. 5 (2016); Sara Hansen, "Clay: Qualities, Benefits, and Therapeutic Applications: A Literature Review" (Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses, 2018), 13.

[13] Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), in Hansen, "Clay: Qualities, Benefits, and Therapeutic Applications," 13.

[14] Dokyoung, Ahuwan, and Danborno, "Clay for Play"; Hansen, "Clay: Qualities, Benefits," 13.

[15] Individuals with such conditions often experience challenges in coordination, communication, and task execution,[1] stemming from limitations in cognitive processing[2] and resulting in motor delays.[3]

[16] D. Daryati and I. D. Aprilia, "Developing Aquatic Therapy Program through Swimming for Children with Motor Delay," in *Affirmation of the Identity of Special Education Science to Support the Implementation of Inclusive Education*, ed. J. Macho and E. R. Sunardi (Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, 2019), 41–42, https://www.academia.edu/39145106/.

[17] Nyatefe, *ABC Portraits*.

[18] Fiaku, *We Can Self-Express*.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Approach

This study employed a case study design with a participant observation approach to investigate how students with intellectual disabilities engage with clay as a medium for artistic expression. The central focus was on understanding the participants' interaction with clay, the techniques they employed, and the extent to which they could manipulate the material to produce simple and composite forms. The study was guided by questions such as: What artistic mediums can people with intellectual disabilities use effectively? How do they manipulate clay? To what extent can they exercise control over the material? These questions informed us of both the design of the art sessions and the observational framework.

Study Site and Participants

The study was conducted at the Garden City Special School in Kumasi(Figure 1), Ghana, an institution established in 1977 to provide educational and social support to individuals formally diagnosed with intellectual disabilities. Approval to conduct the research was obtained from the school administration, accompanied by the standard fee of GH₵100.00, which contributes to student support programs.

A total of nine students were selected by the school authorities to participate in the art sessions. Selection criteria included gender, cognitive ability, and behavioral considerations to ensure a representative and manageable group for observation.

Figure 1. Images of the Garden City Special School. Image by Derrick Fiaku 2019.

Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data were collected. Secondary data included a review of relevant literature, publications, and studies on intellectual disability, art, and clay-based interventions, which informed the research design and interpretation. Primary data were obtained through direct observation of the participants during structured clay sessions at the school premises. Observations focused on participants' engagement, motor skills, cognitive strategies, social interaction, and creative output. The research was conducted in collaboration with Derrick Fiaku, who provided both theoretical and practical support during the sessions.

Materials and Studio Preparation

A temporary studio was prepared in one of the school classrooms as shown in figure 2. Two large tables were covered with plastic film to protect surfaces, and chairs were arranged around the tables for the participants. The clay used in the study was sourced from the Department of Painting and Sculpture, K.N.U.S.T, while supplementary materials including plywood boards (2 × 2 feet) and containers were obtained from local markets. Each participant was provided with a workspace and three lumps of clay for individual manipulation.

Art Sessions

The study comprised four structured sessions, each building on the previous one to progressively develop participants' motor skills, coordination, and expressive capacity.

Session 1 – Sphere Formation:

Participants were introduced to the clay and allowed initial free interaction, during which many paused to observe and inquire about the material. Techniques for creating a sphere were demonstrated: participants were guided to roll clay in their palms, place it on the board, and gently roll it in circular motions. Observations revealed varying abilities: some participants successfully produced well-formed spheres, while others pressed or moved the clay incorrectly. One participant disengaged mid-session. The session lasted one hour, following guidance from the school therapist regarding participants' attention span. Completed spheres were covered with plastic to maintain moisture for subsequent sessions(figure 3).

Session 2 – Cylinder Formation:

Following an initial period of free interaction, participants were guided to form cylindrical shapes (Figure 4) by rolling clay with palms and pressing laterally on the board. All nine participants successfully replicated the demonstration, generally with greater ease than in the previous session. Observed outcomes included a range of lengths and thicknesses, with some participants describing their creations metaphorically (e.g., a "snake"), eliciting social engagement and laughter.

Session 3 – Trapezium Formation:

The third session focused on forming trapezoid shapes (Figure 5). Participants first flattened clay balls using a flat palm, then attempted to taper edges by pinching with index fingers. While all participants could flatten and shape basic forms, none successfully achieved the tapered trapezium, indicating a developmental limitation in fine motor control and coordination. Participants expressed enjoyment, particularly through tactile and auditory feedback as the clay was beaten to flatten it.

Session 4 – Humanoid Form Assembly:

The final session integrated previously learned techniques to construct humanoid figures (Figure 6). Spheres represented heads, trapeziums represented upper and lower bodies, and cylinders represented limbs. Participants employed pinching and joining techniques to assemble the composite forms. Variations in technique produced both deformed and balanced figures, reflecting individual differences in motor coordination, spatial reasoning, and cognitive processing. The session highlighted participants' capacity for combining geometric and organic shapes into representational forms.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures were conducted with guidance from the school's resident therapists, ensuring appropriate interaction and ethical engagement with participants. Consent was obtained from the school administration, and participant welfare was prioritized throughout, with attention to attention span, comfort, and support during tasks.

Data Analysis

Observational data were systematically analyzed to identify patterns in motor engagement, creative expression, collaboration, and cognitive processing. Photographic records of each session supported qualitative interpretation, providing evidence of progress and variation among participants.

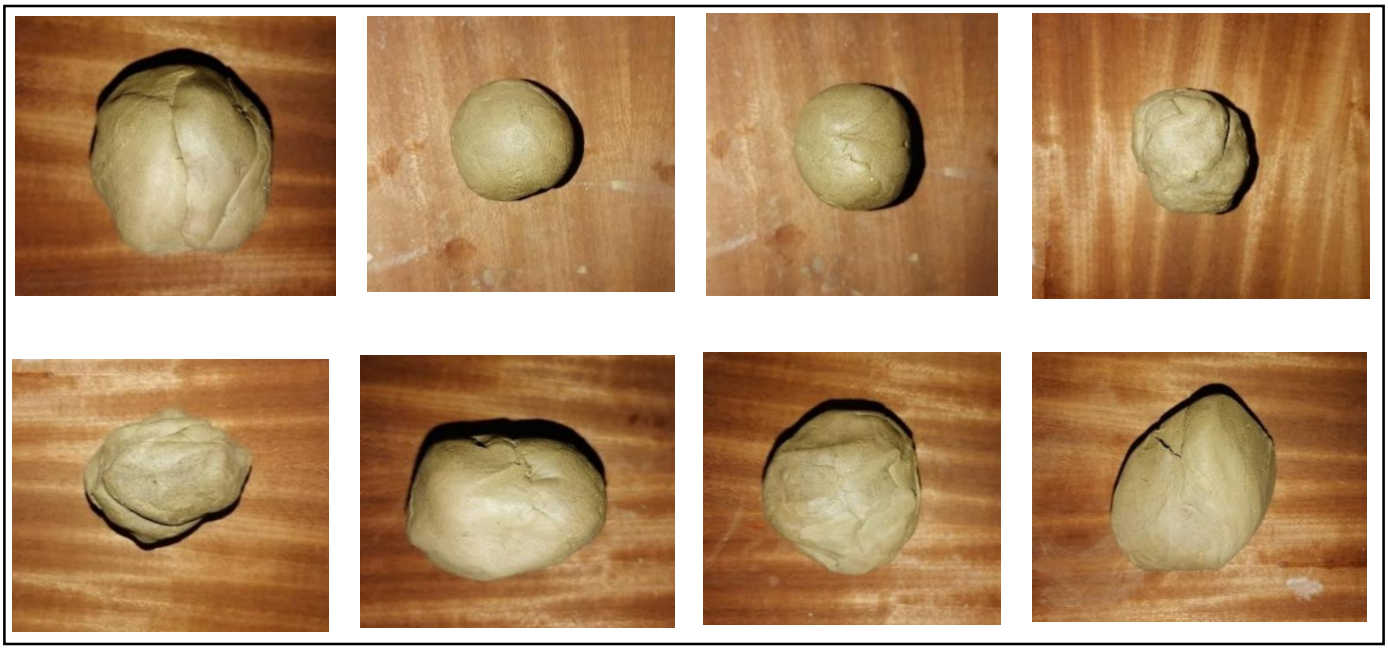

Figure 2. Images of the spheres created by the participants in the first session. Clay work, 2020. Image credited to Ivan F. Ferguson-Fotwe

Figure 3. Images of the cylindrical forms created by the participants in the second session. Clay work, 2020.m Image credited to Ivan F. Ferguson- Fotwe

Figure 4. Images of the trapezium, created by the participants in the third session. Clay work, 2020. Image credited to Ivan F. Ferguson-Fotwe

Figure 5. Images of the humanoid form created by the participants. Clay work, 2019. Photo credit: Ivan Fiifi Ferguson- Fotwe

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings from the clay manipulation sessions reveal important insights into the behavioural responses, motor capabilities, and expressive potential of participants with intellectual disabilities, while also highlighting the significance of guided intervention and collaborative engagement in facilitating artistic participation.

Initial observations indicate that participants' responses to the studio environment were shaped by both situational and cognitive factors. The transformation of the classroom into a makeshift studio introduced a degree of uncertainty, as several participants appeared disoriented upon entry. However, this initial ambiguity quickly transitioned into enthusiasm once participation was initiated, suggesting that structured inclusion plays a critical role in engagement. This observation aligns with findings by Emerson[19] who emphasize that environmental context significantly shapes participation and behavioural responses in individuals with intellectual disabilities The emergence of fatigue within approximately thirty minutes manifested through withdrawal and sleep highlights limitations in sustained attention and endurance, reinforcing existing literature by American Psychiatric Association[20], that associates intellectual disability with reduced concentration spans and increased cognitive load. These findings underscore the importance of designing short, flexible, and responsive art sessions that accommodate participants' cognitive capacities.

Engagement with clay material demonstrated a clear progression from hesitation to active participation, mediated by observation and peer influence. Early interaction was initiated by a few participants, after which others joined through a process of social modelling and encouragement. This pattern reflects the role of social modeling in learning, as proposed by Albert Bandura [21], where individuals adopt behaviors through observation and imitation. Notably, participants exhibited no aversion to the material; instead, their immediate tactile engagement suggests an inherent responsiveness to sensory-based media. This supports the work of Sholt and Gavron[22], who argue that clay's tactile and malleable properties make it particularly suitable for therapeutic and expressive practices. However, the absence of recognizable forms during the initial phase indicates a gap between interaction and intentional creation, attributable either to limited technical knowledge or underdeveloped fine motor coordination.

The introduction of structured demonstrations specifically the formation of spheres, cylinders, trapezoids, and humanoid figures, served as a critical intervention point, enabling a clearer assessment of participants' capabilities. In line with Case-Smiht [23], who highlights the importance of fine motor skills in hand manipulation tasks, participants' performance demonstrated differing capacities in grasping, rolling, pressing, and shaping clay. Rather than functioning as symbolic communicators of internal experiences, participants initially engaged with clay at a sensory and exploratory level, suggesting that expressive abstraction precedes representational intention in this context.

Motor engagement during form-making further illustrates the interplay between physical capability and creative output. The production of spherical forms was characterized by repetitive and exploratory movements, often accompanied by involuntary physical responses such as facial tension and head movements, indicating both effort and concentration. Variations in technique ranging from finger-based pressing to palm-based rolling reflect differing levels of motor control and adaptability. The manipulation of trapezoidal forms, which involved slapping and flattening motions, engaged larger muscle groups, thereby incorporating gross motor skills into the creative process. Similarly, the formation of cylindrical shapes revealed distinct movement patterns, with some participants demonstrating controlled, rhythmic motion, while others exhibited irregular and rapid gestures. These differences underscore the heterogeneity of motor skill development among participants. These observations also confirm that while participants can manipulate clay, the extent of control varies significantly depending on the complexity of the task. The findings support those of Kurniawati[24], who note that individuals with intellectual disabilities often experience challenges in coordination and task execution, particularly when fine motor precision is required.

The construction of humanoid forms represents the most significant indicator of emergent creative capacity. Although structurally varied and often asymmetrical, these forms demonstrate an ability to translate guided instruction into individualized output (Figure 7). Artworks such as artwork 1 and artwork 2 produced, shows compositions combining geometric and organic elements, with variations in proportion and alignment suggesting both cognitive interpretation and motor limitation. Artwork 3 shows relatively balanced form indicates a higher level of spatial awareness, while artwork 4 show difficulties in assembling components highlight challenges in coordination and sequential processing. Similarly, artwork 5, artwork 6 and artwork 7, exhibit a range of textural and structural qualities, influenced by factors such as pressure application, moisture retention, and finger imprinting. The presence of ragged versus smooth surfaces across artworks reflects differences in fine motor control, while compositional inconsistencies point to varying levels of cognitive integration.

[19] Emerson, Eric, Susannah Baines, Lisa Allerton, and Vicki Welch.Health inequalities and people with intellectual disabilities,2012.

[20] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* ,2013

[21] Bandura, Social Learning Theory, 1977.

[22] Sholt and Gavron, Therapeutic qualities of clay-work in art therapy and psychotherapy,2006.

[23]Case-Smith, *Effects of occupational therapy services on fine motor and functional performance in preschool children*, 2000.

[24] Kurniawati, Anisa Dwi, The effect of finger painting towards fine motor skill of intellectual disability,2018

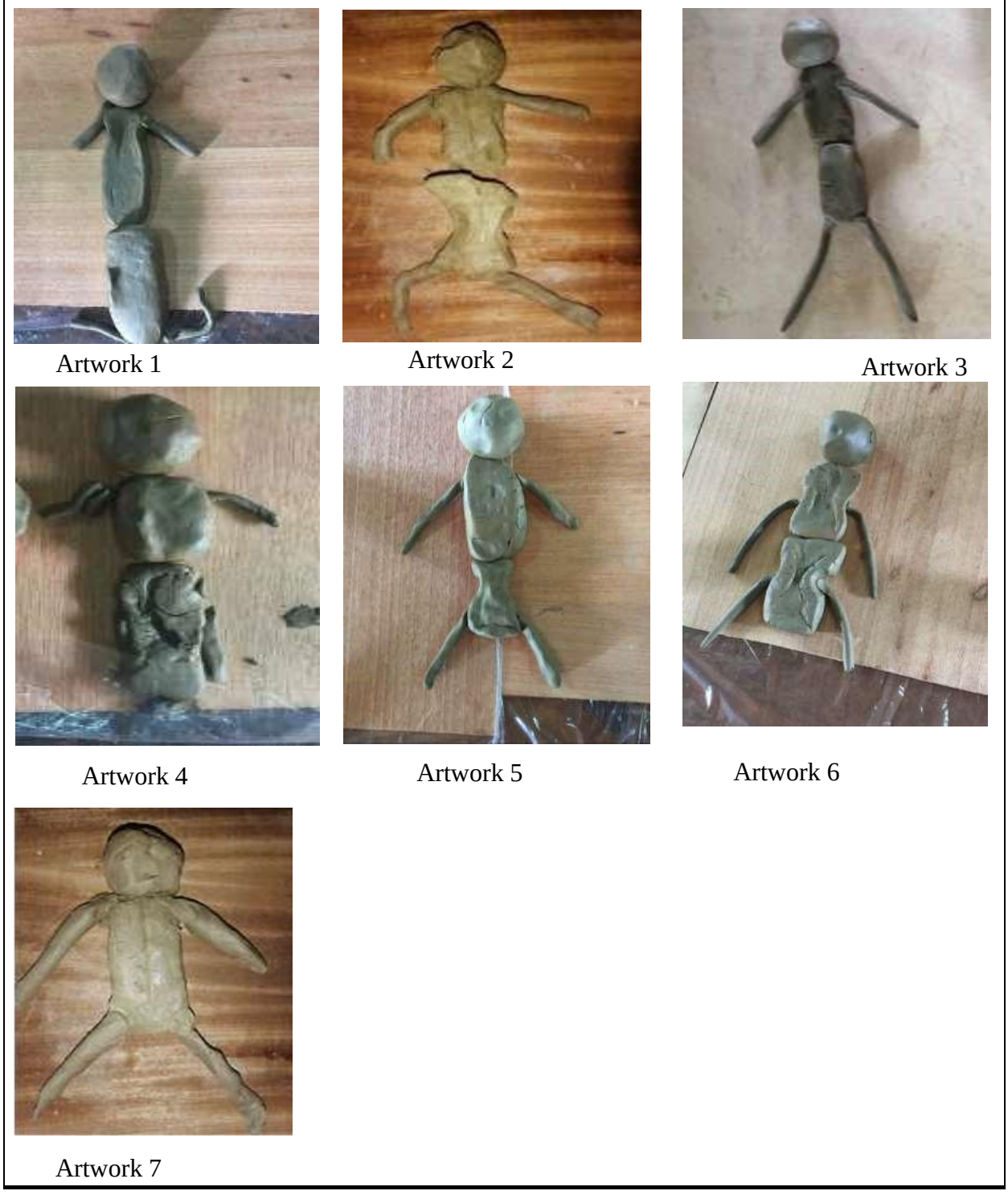

Figure 7. Images of the humanoid form created by participants exhibit. Clay work, 2019. Photo credit: Ivan Fiifi Ferguson-Fotwe

These variations collectively reinforce the argument that artistic output among individuals with intellectual disabilities is not uniform but is shaped by an interaction of motor, cognitive, and environmental factors. Importantly, the ability of participants to

produce humanoid representations even in simplified or abstract forms challenges assumptions that such individuals lack representational or expressive capacity. Instead, it suggests that, when provided with structured guidance, they can engage in meaningful form-making processes. These finding also align with the work of Lowenfeld and Brittain[25], who argues that artistic expression should be understood as a developmental process rather than a measure of technical perfection. The ability of participants to produce recognizable forms, even in simplified or abstract ways, confirms that they possess the capacity for meaningful artistic expression.

Collaboration emerged as a central mechanism facilitating both participation and expression. The establishment of trust between researchers, participants, and school authorities created a supportive environment that encouraged exploration and reduced resistance. Effective communication characterized by simplicity, repetition, and responsiveness to participants' cues proved essential in sustaining engagement. Participants exercised agency within the process, choosing when to continue or withdraw, thereby reinforcing the importance of autonomy in participatory settings.

The conceptual framework of "Use Me" is particularly significant in understanding this dynamic. Rather than implying passivity, the phrase reflects a reciprocal relationship in which participants utilized the researchers as facilitators of expression, while the researchers simultaneously relied on participants' engagement to realize the artistic and investigative process. This mutual dependency repositions participants from passive subjects to active collaborators. This dynamic reflects what Vygotsky (1978) described as socially mediated learning, where knowledge and skills are developed through interaction and guided participation.

Social interaction within the sessions also played a critical role in shaping outcomes. Participants demonstrated curiosity, enthusiasm, and peer awareness, often observing and reacting to each other's work. The presence of laughter, commentary, and shared attention contributed to a positive and inclusive atmosphere, aligning with theories that emphasize the role of social context in learning and creativity. Feedback from school authorities further highlighted the novelty of the activity, contrasting it with the more restrictive art practices typically employed within the school curriculum. This distinction underscores the transformative potential of open-ended, material-based art interventions.

At a broader level, these findings challenge dominant narratives surrounding intellectual disability and creative incapacity. While participants may lack formal artistic training or prior exposure to materials such as clay, their ability to engage, adapt, and produce meaningful forms demonstrates latent creative potential. The goal of the intervention was not to produce professional artists but to create a platform for self-expression, participation, and inclusion. In this regard, the outcomes affirm that individuals with intellectual disabilities are capable of artistic engagement when provided with appropriate support and opportunities.

Furthermore, the process reveals an important therapeutic dimension. Beyond the physical act of manipulation, engagement with clay facilitated emotional release, social interaction, and a sense of accomplishment. The resulting artworks, though technically simple, represent significant achievements within the participants' context, embodying both personal effort and collaborative support. As such, clay-based art practice emerges not only as a creative tool but also as a medium for enhancing well-being, developing motor skills, and fostering social inclusion. This aligns with findings by Hansen [26], who notes that art-making fosters socialization and emotional expression, particularly in group settings.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that intellectual disability does not preclude meaningful engagement in artistic processes or the capacity for self-expression. Through the lens of the "Use Me" framework, participants at the Garden City Special School were positioned as active collaborators, with clay, the researchers, and themselves functioning as mutually responsive agents in the creative process. The art sessions revealed that, when provided with supportive materials and structured freedom, participants could explore, manipulate, and transform clay into forms that reflected both personal interpretation and emerging technical skill.

Clay served as a dynamic medium, linking cognitive intention with motor execution, and enabling participants to translate internal experience into tangible form. From spheres and cylinders to trapeziums and humanoid compositions, participants demonstrated progressive mastery of fine and gross motor skills, spatial reasoning, and sequential planning. Their engagement—evident in relaxed hands, focused attention, and expressive gestures illustrates that creativity among individuals with intellectual disabilities is not limited by cognitive or motor constraints but is unlocked through responsive interaction and opportunity.

[25] Lowenfeld and Brittain, Creative and Mental Growth, 1987

[26] Hansen, The therapeutic effects of clay work in art therapy: A review,2018

The sessions highlighted the importance of reciprocal engagement: participants relied on guidance and demonstration to scaffold their exploration, while researchers relied on participants' curiosity and agency to advance the process. This mutual responsiveness fostered not only artistic outcomes but also social interaction, emotional confidence, and a sense of accomplishment, confirming that art can serve as both a developmental and expressive tool. The positive responses of participants, coupled with the supportive structure of the sessions, underscore the significance of inclusive, participant-centered methodologies in enabling creative expression.

The findings also have broader educational and societal implications. Expanding access to diverse artistic materials such as colorful clay, found objects, and collage elements can enhance opportunities for self-expression, while integrating teachers into the facilitation process ensures sustainability and skill transfer. Beyond skill acquisition, these experiences foster autonomy, social inclusion, and psychosocial well-being, challenging deficit-oriented perceptions of intellectual disability.

Ultimately, the study affirms that persons with intellectual disabilities are capable, creative, and expressive agents when provided with appropriate materials, guidance, and an environment that values exploration. Through the "Use Me" framework, clay is repositioned as an active participant in a collaborative artistic process, enabling participants to assert agency, communicate experience, and expand the boundaries of societal perception. Recognizing and supporting these capacities not only enriches the lives of participants but also broadens societal understanding of creativity, inclusivity, and human potential.

ABOUT AUTHOR(S)

Dorothy Akpene Amenuke (PhD) is an artist who lives and works in Kumasi, Ghana. She is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. Her research interests focus on themes that reference, to a large extent, varied ways of "space" consumption, with mix media and installations. Amenuke is the coordinator of the itinerant OFKOB Artists' Residency in Ghana and she was a member of the advisory board and management team of the international, interdisciplinary and collaborative research project "Advancing Creative Industries for Development in Ghana", which was funded by Danida. She has both solo and group exhibitions to her credit and her work, "How Far How Near" is in the collection of Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (SMA). Amenuke's art involves the manipulation of a variety of fabrics and fibres into objects and spatial installations that evoke feelings of containment and protection or even subtle repulsion. Devotion becomes a recurring metaphor in her use of materials, laborious processes and communal strategies in the production of her art. Her work has found home in journals such as Cultural trends, African Journal of interdisciplinary Studies, Journal of Arts and Humanities and African Arts-MIT Press journals.

Ivan Fiifi Ferguson-Fotwe lives and works in Accra, Ghana. He holds a Master of Fine Arts in Painting and Sculpture and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Sculpture from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi. Ferguson-Fotwe explores difference and individuality as his research focus. He draws ideas from everyday life and questions how society defines what is said to be normal. He reveals how difference carries its own value and meaning. Ivan Fiifi Ferguson-Fotwe taught and mentored students at KNUST. He also engaged with people across society to understand diverse perspectives. These interactions give him insight, and he uses this insight to shape his thinking on identity, memory, and human experience. Ferguson-Fotwe presents his work through exhibitions and experimental installations. He uses material and language to reflect on what it means to be distinct yet connected.

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themselves through clay not only enriched this research but also provided meaningful insights into the creative and expressive capacities of persons with intellectual disabilities.

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