Art Therapy Approaches for Children with Special Educational Needs

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PREFACE

Since societies are constantly moving and focused on development, educational organizations should improve their education processes. Today, we could say that the most significant change has occurred in technology. The digital transformation experienced with the development of technology has also caused educational organizations to be affected by this transformation. Educational organizations should be ahead of society and lead change to meet social needs. Being a learning organization of educational organizations is closely related to the transformations they will experience. For this reason, it is crucial to address the development processes of educational organizations.

I hope that the perspective presented by this book will be beneficial for educators and offer a different perspective on the digital transformation of the education process. I would like to thank esteemed academicians and the EFE ACADEMY family, who contributed to the book's preparation.

Editor

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ART THERAPY APPROACHES FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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INTRODUCTION

Art therapy is a special discipline that includes imaginative methods of interpretation through visual art media. Art therapy, as well as creative art therapy, is an occupation that arose in the fields of art and psychotherapy, and they can differ in definition (Edwards, 2014).

There are three means of use of the art therapy. The first is analytical art therapy. Analytical art therapy is imposed on theories originating from analytical psychology, and in most cases psychoanalysis. Analytical art therapy intensifies on the child, the ideas and the therapist, that art communicates between the two. A different way art therapy is used is art psychotherapy. This standpoint focuses more on the psychotherapist and their verbal analysis of their child's artwork. The last way art therapy is viewed is through the prism of art as therapy. Some art therapists who practice art as therapy believe that verbal analysis of a child's artwork is not essential, and instead emphasize the art-making process. In all of these different approaches to art therapy, the art therapist child goes on a journey to delve into their inner thoughts and feelings using paint, paper and pencil, or even clay (Hacmun et al., 2021).

Art therapy can be used to improve sensory and cognitive motor function, self-awareness, self-esteem, emotional resilience. It can also help resolve conflict and reduce distress (Lusebrink & Hinz, 2020).

Present art therapy includes a significant number of other approaches such as personality, Gestalt, cognitive, behavioral, Adlerian, narrative, and family. The principles of art therapy include humanism, reconciliation of emotional conflicts, creativity, nurturing of personal growth and self-awareness (Hogan, 2015).

In recent years, art therapy, which represents one of the areas of expressive therapies and refers to the therapeutic use of art media, creative media and products of art activities with the aim of solving emotional conflicts, reducing anxiety, developing self-awareness, increasing self-confidence, developing social skills, improving orientation in reality and controlling behavior and addiction (American Art Therapy Association, 2022).

Through the use of different art media, the patient can express and process the questions and problems that brought him to therapy, and the therapist and child are partners and try to understand the artistic process and

the artistic product of the session (Case & Dalley, 2014). In other words, art therapy integrates the fields of visual arts (drawing, painting, sculpting and other forms of artistic expression), knowledge of the creative process and human development with models of counseling and psychotherapy (American Art Therapy Association, 2022). Art therapy is not reserved only for gifted individuals, with a large talent for art (Betts, 2005), but an activity whose aim is healing and communication through aesthetics (Skrbina & Radić, 2010). The goal of art therapy is not to judge the aesthetic appeal of the end products and to develop some technique and artistic competence. The products that the child creates during art therapy are a reflection of his development, abilities, personality, interests, concerns and conflicts. Art activities used in art therapy, whether it's just drawing with a pencil or making a sculpture, involve physical action and provide a rich sensory experience.

The creative process can relieve stress by inducing a change in mood and relaxation (Malchiodi, 2005). Despite the fact that many view art therapy as a form of play, and therefore best suited for treating children, this form of therapy is also used with couples, adults, families and groups of all ages (Malchiodi, 2005).

Art therapy is an effective treatment for children who have experienced trauma (during war, abuse, natural disasters) (Eaton, Doherty, & Widrick, 2007), children and people with poor health (for example due to tumors, asthma) (Geue et al., 2010), individuals with schizophrenia (Patterson, Crawford, Ainsworth, & Waller, 2011), depression (Carneiro, 2010) and similar conditions.

Art therapy uses the artistic medium as elemental means of communication and merges numerous creative techniques from music, art, movement therapy, drama therapy, family therapy, etc. Art allows learning through activities that promote and alleviate educational and social development. Art therapy enables a greater degree of creativity and self-awareness in children with special educational needs (Sakr, 2017).

Art therapy is often referred to special education and covers a child's original modifier for special education services in order to enable them to overcome and succeed in a particular setting. Disabilities that qualify for art therapy often include: Learning Disabilities, Autism, Behavioral Issues, Other disorders on the autism spectrum, ADHD, Emotional Disturbance (Regev et al., 2015).

Psychodynamic approach to art therapy

Psychodynamic therapy is a "global therapy", that is, a form of therapy that concentrates on the holistic perspective of the child, and not on individual symptoms he is facing, as is the case in cognitive-behavioral therapy (Keulen-de Vos, & de Vogel, 2022). Psychodynamic therapy involves interpreting the mental and emotional process, the developmental stages the child has gone through, and not just focusing on behavior (Çolak, 2021).

Psychodynamic art therapy is a non-traditional form of therapy in which the child expresses his feelings, thoughts and emotions through art. This type of therapy is non-directive and unstructured, allowing the child to lead the session. They are usually organized once a week and last about an hour. The users create certain creations and in doing so discuss the emotions they caused in them, connect them with childhood events, discuss the meaning they find in the creations (Case & Dalley, 2014).

It is mostly used in people who are shy and do not want to talk, treatment of fears, anxiety and depression (Keulen-de Vos, & de Vogel, 2022).

Humanistic approach to art therapy

Humanistic psychology, also known as the "third force in psychology", represents an alternative to behavioral and psychoanalytic approaches. Unlike other approaches that are based on the past, the unconscious and conflicts, the humanistic approach is based on the person in the present (DeCarvalho, 1990). One of the models in the humanistic approach is the child-centered model, which is based on unconditional positive support of the child by the therapist. A central aim of the centering model is to help people become more autonomous, spontaneous and confident. People are helped to find the causes of problems in themselves and to solve and overcome them (Malchiodi, 2003a).

Another model is the *Gestalt art therapy model.* The term "Gestalt" refers to a whole form or configuration, not a simple sum of individual parts. The purpose of this model is to encourage a honest, responsible, authentic, and direct way of communication between the user and the therapist, in the direction of exploring the feelings and thoughts of the child (Rhyne, 2016). Complete sensorimotor activation is required from the child, which is

thought to lead to problem recognition and clarification. It is intended for children who are active, capable and dedicated to achieve their potential. Sessions are generally organized on the basis of self-direction and self-motivation, and the therapist facilitates the realization and is responsible for the achievement of treatment goals and self-evaluation (Rhyne, 2001). Gestalt therapists believe that people can be agents of their own personal development process and health, not using their knowledge to interpret the user's artwork, but to facilitate and encourage the user-initiated process, sometimes providing examples or experiments for research of the internal dynamics of the users, discovering new paths and directions. Also, supporters of Gestalt therapy believe that creativity in people is innately connected to the life process, and the ability to express through different verbal and non-verbal languages is a natural potential of all people (Hogan, 2015).

Next is the *transpersonal model*, which, like other models of the humanistic approach, considers that what is outside the person is also important for his well-being. The transpersonal model seeks to influence the body, mind, and spirit through a combination of humanistic principles, artistic expression, spiritual practices such as meditation, and mind-body concepts (Kossak, 2009). Similar to the user-centered model, the transpersonal model strives to maintain the personal innate capacity for growth and healthy development. The therapist in this model detects personal needs to improve other areas of life, such as relationships, but also tries to detect emotional crises, serious illnesses or similar conditions (Hocoy, 2005).

Cognitive-behavioral approach to art therapy

Cognitive-behavioral therapy includes several different approaches: cognitive-behavioral modification, rational-emotive behavior therapy, and cognitive therapy. Common to all approaches is the commitment to determine the personal expectations, assumptions, and interpretation of events that are responsible for creating negative emotions in the child, which in turn lead to anxiety, depression and various other types of emotional disorders. A basic objective of cognitive-behavioral therapy is to help the child identify false and negative rules or premises that shape behavior and activities and to replace or reorganize them into more positive and realistic rules and expectations (Rosal, 2016).

The basis of this approach is the formation of a collaborative relationship between the therapist and the child. This model is directive and structured, with the therapist taking an educational and active role in the therapeutic process. In most cases, the main goal is to eliminate or significantly reduce the child's symptoms within the framework of 6 to 20 sessions, as well as to create systems in the user to prevent the recurrence of symptoms. The cognitive-behavioral model is also action-oriented, it is necessary that the child is willing to invest energy and time in the treatment, both during the session and in free time outside the session, i.e. it is necessary that the child himself be an active participant (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2018).

The initial session begins with a presentation of the model, an explanation of the objectives, after which it moves on to an artistic representation of the problem. Instead of asking the child verbally why he is depressed, he is instructed to draw a picture that represents the things or problem that make him depressed and moody. In order to be able to interpret the drawing later, the therapist prepares questions in advance: what is the problem, what can the picture tell about the problem, what feelings and thoughts came to you when you drew the picture, what thoughts do you have now? It is important in this approach to use simple directions, instructions and materials, so that the child can use them without any problem (McMullin, 2000).

Image creation can also be used to restructure experiences or behavior and develop visual strategies for positive change. Example exercises: draw a "picture of a stressful situation", draw a picture "how I prepare for a stressful situation", draw a picture "step by step solving a problem". In addition to drawing, collage techniques, modeling, etc. can be used (Rosal, 2016).

Developmental approach to art therapy

Many therapists integrate various developmental frameworks in their work, such as psychosocial and psychosexual approaches and object relations, but are generally guided by the developmental stages of Lowenfield, Gardner, Kellogg, Golomb, and Piaget's general developmental principles. The developmental model is primarily intended for working with children, but its application to other ages is not excluded, especially for persons with physical disabilities, cognitive problems or developmental delays. Also quite often applied to adults who have experienced trauma or emotional stress, artistic expression is thought to evoke early sensory

experiences and give them symbolic expression. By applying the developmental model of art therapy, the therapist can assess the child's mental, emotional, creative status, but also motor, cognitive and social abilities (e.g., whether a child with motor disorders or autism has a lineation or pencil grip that is appropriate for his age; whether an adolescent with developmental delays has reached the level of specific operations; whether he has visio-motor coordination, etc.), (Aach-Feldman & Kunkle-Miller, 2016).

The development model of art therapy has several positive impacts, but the most significant are (Chilton & Wilkinson, 2016):

• **sensory stimulation:** the use of art and materials to stimulate and develop the user's sensory, visual, motor and interactive abilities.

• **acquisition of skills:** learning and mastering a certain activity through a series of successive steps, in the direction of accommodating difficult motor skills. (e.g. The therapist breaks down the activity into several steps: 1. learning how to sit properly at the desk, 2. making eye contact with the therapist, 3. learning how to hold a brush, 4. learning how to dip the brush in water, 5. learning how to paint with a brush, etc.). For some users, abilities develop in a few sessions, while for others it may take a longer period.

• **adaptation**: adaptations of work materials and tools might be necessary for some children.

Expressive model of art therapy

The idea of expressive art therapy dates back to the second half of the 20th century, although the beginnings can be found much earlier in ancient societies. Some authors describe expressive art therapy as an inclusion of several areas, art-painting, music, dance/movement, drama and poetry, considering it as a multimodal process (Malchiodi, 2003b).

Expressive therapy is individually tailored. Although there is no pre-set scene, sometimes a certain art form can be used to encourage further expression. For some, the session can start with drawing, for others with reading poetry or performing certain movements or dancing. A typical session begins with warm-up activities, the therapist usually chooses a pattern in which the child feels the safest and most comfortable. Over time, as the child adapts to the model, he gradually and spontaneously moves to a new way of expression. The transition is significant for increasing

spontaneity in expression, increasing creativity, better expression of feelings (Nucho, 2003).

Expressive art therapy uses multiple senses, multisensory, in order to fully explore the inner and outer world through the creation of various works. The most popular therapeutic approaches in expressive art therapy are: finger painting, game with drawing a winding line, making masks, wet paper technique, kinetic family drawing therapy (Dilawari, K., & Tripathi, N. (2014).

Meaning of colors in child's drawings

	Blue is the color of dreams, but also the coldest color of all. Light blue is the color of meditation and tranquility, the color of truth, loyalty, creativity, eternity. It also signifies the spiritual side of the personality, it can also mean sadness, depression, despair. Dark blue indicates emptiness.
	Orange is somewhere between yellow and red in the color spectrum. Denoting something between spirituality and libido. Symbol of fidelity, passion, fertility. It can also be a symbol of health and prosperity. On the other hand, orange can also be a symbol of inappropriate sexual relations, sexual abuse.
	Red is the color of love, fire and hell, it signifies rage, danger, strength, passion, aggression, power, courage, violence, blood, sometimes sexual impulses.
	Black is the color of danger, death, mystery, fear
	Gray color can be a sign of depression, illness, confusion, feeling of isolation, sadness, melancholy
	Green is the color of hope, nature, creativity, strength, immortality, freedom, knowledge, jealousy, independence, transformation
	Like others, yellow color has positive and negative meaning It can mean energy, activity, happiness, freedom, intellect, agility, eternal life. But it can also mean deception, betrayal, adultery, cruelty, old age (Eiseman, 2017).

House-tree-person drawing technique

This drawing technique has been proposed by J. Buck back in 1948, called "House. Tree. Person". The interpretation of these drawings is used to create a picture of the person's emotional, social, and cognitive functioning. Since it is believed that the concepts "house", "tree", "person" does not carry

any explicit emotional meaning, everything that the child expresses in these drawings and everything that he attributes to these objects are his own emotional reactions expressed in an explicit or symbolic form. Each of these objects must be considered as a self-portrait, because the child gives it certain characteristics that are meaningful to him (Sheng et al., 2019).

The methodology consists of two stages: in the first - the child creates drawings, in the second - a conversation takes place, when the child describes and explains what he drew. After all the drawings are finished, the special educator continues the conversation. There are many questions to help clear up any confusion and provide important information about the child with special educational needs, such as: Who lives in the house?, Do people visit the house?, Is it a happy house?, What is the house made of?, What goes on inside the house? What kind of tree is it?, How old is the tree?, What season is it?, Is the tree alive?, Who waters the tree? Who is the person?, How old is the person?, How does that person feel?, Is the person happy?, What does the person like doing? (Li et al., 2011).

Picture1. House-tree-person expressive technique of art therapy (Beyond Art Therapy Modified House-Tree-Person/A Beyond Art Therapy Technique: https://www.creativecounseling101.com/house-tree-person-art-therapy-technique.html

Picture 2. House-tree-person expressive technique of art therapy (Practical Psychology. The House-Person-Tree Personality Test: https://practicalpie.com/house-person-tree-test/

House:

The house is a representation of the child's self and ego. The size of the house should be noted, a big house (very controlled atmosphere or a big ego), a small house (low self-esteem or rejection of home life). Where is it located on the sheet: in the center, upper corners or lower corners, is it grounded or floating, does it look welcoming and warm? (Soundy, 2012). Lines also indicate the ego, thick lines are a sign of a strong ego, thin lines are a sign of a weaker ego. The lines can also indicate how the child sets boundaries with the outside world. Does it have an entryway: shows how the child communicates, interacts with the environment, does he allow someone else to enter his world (Farokhi & Hashemi, 2011). Whether there are windows and doors show how open and approachable the child is to others. A lack of windows and doors indicates an introverted, closed type, while an abundance of windows and doors can also mean too much dependence on others. The roof is a representation of religiosity, intellect and imagination. The chimney can be a sign of openness but also of the role of the father. The smoke indicates warmth and caring in the father. Too much smoke can mean too much masculine energy. The lack of a chimney can mean a lack of warmth and security for the child (Anning & Ring, 2004).

Tree:

The trunk of the tree is the child's ego. The branches are the way it interacts with the environment. If the branches are short, it may be an introverted person. Too long branches can be a sign of dependence on others, and bare branches a sign of depression and hopelessness (Anning & Ring, 2004).

Person:

Where is the face in the drawing, what size is it? The size of the person is related to self-esteem and self-concept (self-image). A small person means low self-evaluation, depression, lack of energy. Average size means a healthy person, a person bigger than a house means overestimation, delusions, unrealistic expectations (Hopperstad, 2010).

Is the person near the house or far away, are the arms folded (which can be a sign of fear and anxiety) or is he waving and pointing with his fingers (presence of aggression). The feet indicate awareness and groundedness. Small feet can be a sign of insecurity (Anning & Ring, 2004).

Expressiveness of the lines: the thickness, the intensity of the color and the trace that is left should be analyzed. Strong lines (traces) can be a sign of aggressiveness, impulsiveness, passion, while weak lines are a sign of withdrawal, shyness, feeling of lack (Anning & Ring, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Art can demonstrate thousands of individual thoughts. This maybe in the form of dancing, music, drama, dancing, or creative arts in general. Most children say that art helps them express their emotions and thoughts. It is a way for them to relieve stress or to show emotions and feelings.

Some of children with special educational needs are non-verbal. This means they sometimes find their own ways of communication. Some may use hand signs in communication, some of them may use technology to deliver their message, and some of the children with communication problems use art in communicating.

The art works speak of children emotions and feelings which they are not able to share with us directly. This is also a way for parents and special education teachers to know whether the child is emotionally feeling ok or is it struggling. Painting, coloring, drawing – these all require the use of art tools such as paint brush, pencil, colored pencils, scissors, which actually

helps in fine motor skills development and strengthening. It also helps children to think of solutions or think of other object that can be used as replacement in order to be able to complete their art projects. When the child is missing one color it is trying to find it with making a combination of the colors they have, because there are thousands of ways to be creative and to be resourceful. Additionally, children feel motivated and feel acknowledged for something they exerted effort on. Completing the art work is always motivating them to do better and give their best in everything they do. And most importantly, it boosts their confidence and self-esteem not just in the field of art but with others too. All forms of art can be beneficial for the children with special educational needs. This is why art should be part of the curriculum in the special schools.

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