



*Original Contribution*

## THE ROLE OF EXPRESSIVE THERAPIES IN THERAPEUTIC INTERACTIONS; ART THERAPY – EXPLANATION OF THE CONCEPT

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### ABSTRACT

Art therapy is a form of psycho-corrective interaction, using different artistic means to facilitate a patient to express emotions. It helps to meet the emotional needs, build self-acceptance, increase self-esteem, reduce anxiety, meet the cognitive needs and develop social skills. Art therapy develops imagination and creativity, empathy, forms pro-social attitude, and what is important, shows that artistic abilities do not play any role in the process of creation. More examples show that participation in different kinds of art therapy investigate emotional states, provoke positive changes in cognitive development, bypass the communication barrier. The scope of the benefits of art therapy seems to attract to this form of therapeutic and educational activities. Art therapy techniques are a great way to promote development of a child, and this is the reason of the wide application of the art therapy in education. Art therapy can be used both to healthy people and patients, children and adults. It should be emphasized that the art therapy is perfect way of nonpharmacological interventions in the patient's life.

**Key words:** art therapy, artistic means, visual arts, creativity, therapeutic activities

The word "art therapy" is derived from the Latin *arte* (*ars*, *artis*), meaning craft, handicraft, and also art, and the Greek word *therapeuein* - treatment. Etymologically the word means "therapy through art".

In Polish literature, this form of psycho-corrective interaction is also called "art therapy", "treatment by visual arts" or "visual arts therapy", and as in the field of art therapy there are not only artistic techniques, this form of work with a patient is sometimes called therapy through creativity. (1)

Similarly, as is the case with other forms of psycho-corrective interactions, there are many scenes in art therapy. One of the most common is the concept of W. Szulc whereby art therapy involves the use of different artistic means for expression of emotions. (2)

According to W. Dykcik, art therapy is "spontaneous, uninhibited creativity of a man associated with the use of widely understood works of art and doing arts (e.g. drawing, painting, modeling, sculpting, singing, dancing, poetry, biographies and memoirs, reading etc.).

An important point of this view is its focus on education and recreation, as well as the prevention and correction of disorders. (3)

On the other hand, according to A. Janicki art therapy is a treatment method based on various theoretical concepts, merging with occupational therapy, sociotherapy, education through art, psychology and pedagogy. (4)

The person who conducts art therapy is called art therapist, with appropriate preparation and knowledge of visual arts, psychology and psychotherapy. (5)

### Basic techniques of art therapy (6)

Art therapy includes music therapy, chronotherapy as well as therapeutic activities using theater, film, visual arts: painting, sculpture and drawing. Artistic means used in art therapy also include: poetry, any form of creative writing, as well as creation of sand. (7) So music therapy uses music to achieve positive changes in the physical, mental and social functioning. Theatre therapy encourages to rebound repressed emotions, affects development of self-creation, allows an entry into other social roles, helps in reinforcing positive behavior and develops intellectual and esthetic needs. Choreotherapy is based on a belief that movement and dance integrate emotional, cognitive and physical realm of a

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man. This technique contributes to the acceptance of one's physicality with which patients often have a problem.

Bibliotherapy is to use books or materials not printed, to meet the goals of revalidation, rehabilitation, prevention and general development. (8) Artistic expression is spontaneous. It is shaped by experiences, feelings and insights of a young man who manifests this way his own attitudes, feelings and values. The classes use creative activity: drawing, painting, and modeling. Artworks allow you to reach thoughts, dreams, desires, joys and sorrows of the author. For some people it is the only indirect form of externalizing their own world of experiences by using symbols. It allows to release from established behavior, compensates for the shortcomings, realizes intentions and desires that do not had a chance to be fulfilled in reality. (9)

Another, equally creative technique is the sand therapy, also called a therapy in the sandbox, involving spontaneous building of a "miniature world" in a box filled with sand. The process of creation is itself a process of creative transformation and integration. (10) The art therapy also covers movie therapy understood of course as a technique in psychotherapy, in contrast to the use of a movie in psychoeducation, prevention or other forms of psychological support and personal development. (11) Educational and at the same time therapeutic aspect of a movie is based on a conviction that it can significantly affect the emotional and volitional sphere of a man causing a change in behavior of an individual, based on internalized by an individual standards taken from the hero of a movie. (12) Although in Poland film therapy is relatively a new form of therapeutic reactions, it is a valuable tool to support professional psychological help.

In the art therapy may or may not be applied only one of the techniques described above. If in the therapeutic process are used more forms, then we are talking about the so-called an integrated approach or art therapy using various techniques. Art therapy usually takes the form of group workshops (13), and a choice of the techniques themselves depends primarily on the objectives to be achieved, recommendations of doctors and therapists, as well as the preferences of a patient. Regardless of your choice, artistic activity is not the aim but a means of achieving a positive change. (14)

### **Objectives / functions of art therapy**

According to M. Kulczycki, objectives of therapy through art can be boiled down to three basic functions: recreational, educational and corrective. The first of these is to enable detachment from the problems, relaxation, and rest.

The second function is to provide information to help reflect on the meaning and purpose of life, as well as the disclosure of one's own desires and needs, development of sensitivity and formation of aesthetic feelings. The objective of the corrective function is to transform harmful mechanisms, causing mainly negative self-image and relations with others, into the valuable ones. (15)

Basing on the views of Polish and foreign authors one can generalize that the purpose of art therapy is to help meet the emotional needs, building of self-acceptance, and consequently - increase of self-esteem, reduction of anxiety, meeting the cognitive needs and development of social skills. "Its purpose is to stimulate activity and provide the means to meet, organize, express, understand one's own emotions and unload and relieve negative for health states of frustration and tension in a way socially acceptable" <sup>16</sup>

### **The history of art therapy**

Although the expressive therapy appears to be relatively a young field of therapeutic reactions, Mc Niff notes that yet in antiquity art was an important element of human life. (17) That time "art therapies" were primarily preventive and educative acts. (18)

According to the preserved remittances, the Egyptians insisted on encouraging people with existing mental disability to get involved in artistic activities. (19) The Greeks used drama and music in pedagogical activities, attaching great importance to the calming qualities of music. (20) Created and defined by Aristotle's, the concept of *catharsis* has just been referenced to art, becoming a feature of the ancient tragedy. The tragic events had to liberate pity and fear in a viewer by showing his own fears and problems on a stage.

He had to understand from "external" position the impact of the weakness on his "inside" and thus led to the purification of these emotions and to the inner peace. (21)

In Renaissance Europe, thanks to the English humanist Robert Burton and his treaty *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), the attention was paid not only to the medical and psychological aspects of depression, but also

the role of the imagination in the process of treatment. Thus, music and dance have become a platform for contributing to improving the well-being of patients.

The concept of using art as an adjunct to the psychiatric treatment appeared in the period from late 1800 until 1900 with the creation of psychiatry as a field of medicine. The research on the creative personality was conducted in two directions. The first one was to find mechanisms of personality which are the cause of creative behavior, the second one – to put the objective to detect some typical personality traits common to creative individuals. (22)

Psychopathological theory of Cesare Lombroso's proclaimed close relationship between genius and insanity. (23) "Due to the fact that originally the art therapy was used in the case of mentally ill people, this theory gave art therapy that extra sense – it was not only to help diagnose disorders of a sick person, but could also lead to the discovery of talents and achievements of high aesthetic value." (24)

Achievements of Jacob Moreno on the ground of psychiatry and psychology have contributed to popularization of psychodrama in the treatment of psychiatric disorders, and thus showed how important it is to allow incarnation into significant to someone character or, impossible in many therapeutic situations, reversal of roles.(25) Carl G. Jung also encouraged patients to express emotions through visual arts. (26)

Interested in developmental psychology, American psychologist from the first half of the twentieth - Florence Goodenough - contributed to the use of drawing techniques to measure intelligence of children. At the same time, a British psychologist of the childhood - Margaret Lowenfeld has developed, the hugely popular, educational techniques, with particular emphasis on the use of children's drawing both in diagnosis and treatment.

As a pioneer of Polish art therapy is considered Stefan Szuman – an educator, a psychologist and a doctor. In 1927, he defended his doctoral thesis entitled: *"The Art of a child. Psychology of drawing creativity of a child"* and a year later he published the first written in Polish article about art therapy titled *The impact of fairy tales on the psyche of a child*.

In the 30s and 40s of the twentieth century, there was an increased interest in artistic creativity and its use in the therapy. Psychiatrists of that time recognized the

enormous potential of the non-verbal techniques: painting, making music, dancing.

The renowned hospitals and clinics, such as the Menninger in Kansas and St. Elizabeths in Washington, DC, incorporated the elements of visual arts and dancing into their therapy program. The art therapy has become part of university programs as well as therapeutic training. Thanks to the relevant methodology as well as and the theoretical grounding, research on expressive therapies were intensified. Also the number of publications on this subject increased.

In the second half of the twentieth century, there was a further increase in interest in art therapy. In 1959 there was established the Société Internationale de Psychopathologie de l'Expression in Paris. Also in the United States, in 1960 there was established the first professional association of art therapists and they began to teach in this direction and issue professional newspapers. (27)

One of the leading figures of this period became Anna Halprin. Connected with modern dance and also activities promoting human development through dance, she laid the groundwork for the modern dance therapy. (28) Her educational and therapeutic activities included not only the problems of an individual, but also important social issues: marginalization of people living with HIV and AIDS, racial problems as well as cancers, which directly related to Halprin. As she emphasizes herself, after being diagnosed with cancer in 1972, a special place in her thinking took the mutual relations between body and mind. (29)

The development of the modern Polish art therapy is dated on the 90s of the twentieth century. In 1989, there was founded The Polish Committee of the International Society for Education through Art.

It gathered people of culture, art, science, education, management and animation of culture, artists, teachers and educators. (30) In 2003 there was founded the "Kajros" Association of Polish Art Therapists and then other institutions promoting art therapy.

### **Objects under influence of art therapy**

Expressive therapies have been incorporated into a variety of programs to improve mental health, rehabilitation, becoming an element of both the basic and supportive treatment. (31)

They are used in psychiatry, pediatrics, geriatrics and rehabilitation. The art therapy is

used in relaxing training as the stress relieving therapy for children with impaired attention, prolonged bed-wetting, in rehabilitation of young people with reduced intellectual ability, rehabilitation of juvenile offenders. It is used in the treatment and diagnosis of family functioning, as a treatment for people exhibiting neurotic, psychotic disorders or behavioral abnormalities. Due to the diagnostic and psychotherapy advantages, art therapy is used in psychiatry of developmental age. (32) No less important is the significance of its preventive function; it is used both to adults and children and adolescents.

Researchers of the issue as well as practitioners point out the particular importance of the use of art therapy in relation to children with yet limited language. For them, visual arts, movement, music or play often become not only the most appropriate, but actually the only way to express themselves. For this reason, art therapy may be particularly important for children of preschool age.

A small child needs a sense of emotional security. Not being able to talk about his/ her feelings - desires, anxieties and problems, he/ she locks, adopts an attitude of withdrawal, moves away from the others. This condition often leads to release of negative emotions in the form of uncontrolled explosions, inadequate to the stimulus. Emotions demanding the expression can be released as a result of art therapy. This form of therapeutic will help a child learn to express his feelings in communication with others.

Stefan Szuman in his publications drew attention to the genesis of children's curiosity of world and creative abilities of a child, which can be perfectly used in art therapy. A child in the preschool age has a natural for its age need for creative expression. The work of children is a reflexive action; it can be said fully natural. A child during therapeutic activities learns to manifest its own experiences, feelings, understanding and acceptance of itself and others. A child has an ability to meet needs of, among others, safety, acceptance, being understood, perceived and appreciated.

Thanks to classes of therapy, children receive support in the development of the accurate control of motions and spatial awareness.

Art therapy classes enrich the aesthetic sensibility of a child, develop his/ her interests and improve impaired motor skills. Depending

on the techniques used, one can influence on development and improvement of skills and abilities of a child. Thanks to the music therapy, children develop their sensitivity and musical imagination, sense of rhythm, they learn to focus on a specific task, concentrate and be disciplined. Skillfully chosen music "silences" excessive negative emotions and stimulates positive emotions, and thereby causes physical and mental relaxation, reduces anxiety, aggression, allowing a child to restore his/ her inner balance. Fairytale therapy contributes to development of social sensitivity, imagination, expands the sphere of experience, affects the self-esteem and allows believing in someone's own strength. Relaxation favors mental recovery, affects well-being, and helps a child in necessary mental leisure. (33)

Of course, children are not the only addressee to art therapy. Some techniques, such as music therapy are used in groups of different age patients treated in painkillers clinics, in maternity wards, health facilities of treatment of rheumatic diseases and post-traumatic stress disorder. (34)

Art therapy is extremely helpful in the case of the "blockage" of a patient undergoing professional therapy when there are dysfunctional interpersonal relationships patient – therapist. It is also a perfect complement to verbal therapy. (35) "Painting, drawing, playing with color, forms, participants create works that illustrate their inner experience and become a starting point to talk about themselves and the excuse to reinterpret the past experience.

For a therapist, the participant's creations constitute the source of information on his problems, psychophysical condition and a record of the changes taking place in his inner life." (36)

As noticed by the art therapist and the teacher - Natalia Błaszczynska, "an art therapist provokes participants to self-effort and stabilizes their attention on the effects. Well-conducted art therapy is not just filling the time and decommissioning of boredom, but becomes for the patient an opportunity to establish contact with the environment, find a new passion, rescue and develop what indestructible, what has survived in spite of a disease. Skillful management of art therapy's activities leads to detect internal inhibitions and neutralize obstacles to the internal development." (37) In turn, presenting the works to the public, as it is in the case of visual

arts, as well as their occasional sale, affects raise of a creator's self-esteem, increases self-acceptance and fosters contacts with other people. Communing with art enables to divert attention from a disease, which is why art therapy is also recommended for people suffering from cancer (38), as pointed out A. Halprin.

So art therapy techniques are a great way to promote development of a child, and this is the reason of the wide application of the art therapy in education. Art therapy develops imagination and creativity, develops empathy, forms pro-social attitude, and what is important, shows that artistic abilities do not play any role in the process of creation. The scope of the benefits of art therapy seems to attract to this form of therapeutic and educational activities. For this reason, especially in the United States and some European countries therapists are also employed in prisons, addiction treatment centers, nursing homes and hospices. (39) It is worth to increasingly disseminate art therapy in various countries of the world.

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