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## Therapeutic Art with Students: the Process and the Product.

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<b>Abstract:</b>	When art is used therapeutically, anyone can reap the benefits. One such group is children. Lenore Steinhardt developed techniques focused around cognitive and emotional development as an art therapist—specifically non-verbal graphic mirroring and having the therapist act as a graphic secretary for the child. Both of these art therapy techniques help cognitive and emotional growth because they use alternate forms of communication. Art is a way of escaping negative stressors in one's life. Especially for children, art is used as a safe zone from reality. If art were used in schools—whether on the most minimalistic level or the most engaging—educators would be able to help in the cognitive and emotional growth of their students more effectively.
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Therapeutic Art with Students: the Process and the Product.

A look at the emotional and cognitive benefits of Art Therapy.

Abstract:

Art has been around for thousands of years. When art is used therapeutically, people of all backgrounds and situations reap the benefits. One particular group that benefits from art therapy is children. Because they are still developing cognitively and emotionally, those are two beneficial areas that are easier to see and expand upon through art. There are multiple art therapy techniques that help with cognitive and emotional development. Lenore Steinhardt developed many techniques focused around such development as an art therapist—specifically *non-verbal graphic mirroring* and having the *therapist act as a graphic secretary for the child*. These and various other art therapy techniques help cognitive and emotional growth because they use alternate forms of communication. Verbal communication occurs, but the important form of communication is the silent act of the art itself. Art tells a lot about an individual, it is also a way of escaping negative stressors in one's life. Especially for children, art is used as a safe zone from reality. If art were used in schools—whether on the most minimalistic level or the most engaging—educators would be able to help in the cognitive and emotional growth of their students more effectively.

*Therapeutic Art with Children: the Process and the Product. A look at the emotional and cognitive benefits of Developmental Art Therapy.*

Pablo Picasso once said, “painting is just another way of keeping a diary” (Kashon, 2011, p. 1). Art has been used as a communicative device since the first cavemen drew on cavern walls. Over the years, hundreds of different art forms have developed. The purpose of art has also expanded. It is not just a communicative device anymore; it is a form of healing. This new form of healing is called art therapy. According to the American Art Therapy Association (AATA):

“Art therapy is the therapeutic use of art making within a professional relationship, by people who experience illness, trauma, or challenges in living and by people who seek personal development. Through creating art and reflecting on the art products and processes, people can increase awareness of self and others; cope with symptoms, stress, and traumatic experiences; enhance cognitive abilities; and enjoy the life-affirming pleasures of making art” (AATA, 2008).

Many people can benefit from art therapy. Whether they are young or old, have a disability, working through a disorder, or simply enjoy the art making process—there is no individual that art therapy can not affect. Educators should use more art therapy in the classroom. When educators utilize the art therapy process, there are emotional and cognitive benefits for their students. This discussion examines those benefits—what and how they are achieved.

The art therapy process that allows both emotional and cognitive benefits to occur is as unique as the individual. There are vast arrays of techniques used in art therapy with children that allow for emotional and cognitive improvements. Six particular techniques used by Lenore Steinhardt are non-verbal graphic mirroring, joint nonverbal conversation drawing, the squiggle game, directed scribble, allowing the child to act as graphic secretary for the therapist, and having the therapist act as a graphic secretary for the child. Two of the techniques will be

examined; non-verbal graphic mirroring and having the therapist act as a graphic secretary for the child.

In non-verbal graphic mirroring the therapist silently copies whatever the child is drawing. This is a non-threatening way to approach children utilizing art therapy for the first time. To implement this technique, you may start off by implying that you and the student will connect better if you copy their art. As you copy the choice of color, pressure, and speed that the lines are drawn in, take note of the attitude of the student as you mirror them. As you continue copying the art piece, change it up by switching colors or even the picture being drawn. This shows acknowledgement to the student that you and they are not the same, and allows the student to not feel weighed down by your presence, but rather, feels support and validity from your actions (Wadeson et al., 1989, p. 342). “Making...[the art-making process]...open and valid somehow implies higher value on the emerging drawing as well as placing the child in a position of leadership as...[you]...follow, and giving it a feeling that...[the student]...is not alone in this activity” (Wadeson et. al., 1989, p. 342). As educators, we must be a support system for our students. When they trust us, the communication channels can open up and goals can be achieved.

When the therapist acts as the graphic secretary for the child, the trust is taken to whole other level. The child has complete creative control and can instruct the therapist to create anything from a quick line drawing, to a giant mural. “The [educator] draws the entire picture by instruction, further stimulating the child’s creative imagination by gently asking questions regarding color, size, placement, and detail of the objects requested” (Wadeson et. al., 1989, p.354). This is a tremendous technique to use with any child, but especially a child that has difficulty with spontaneous techniques. Children who are organically impaired tend to make art

akin to scribbles because of their limited motor skills. But, like any child, they may yearn to make more technical art. This gives them that opportunity, if they want it. “The authority person [educator] becomes an accepting helper who enables the child to begin just where he or she is, emotionally and intellectually, with no other demands” (Wadeson et. al., 1989, p.355). This the most non-judgmental, threatening way to communicate through art with a child.

All of these techniques are pathways to better communication, but the benefits of art therapy do not stop there.

“As educators, we want the child to move forward intellectually through opportunities to master the outside world. We want this growth not be restricted to cognition but to include emotional growth. Therapy can be viewed as a special kind of learning that deals with a person’s inner world and the immediate outside world” (Dalley et al.,1987, p. 31).

There are well-known emotional benefits of art-making. Youth have been using art and play to cope with the world around them since the dawn of mankind. For students who struggle with learning or other disabilities, this is especially true:

“When you make art in relation to your disability, you are practicing control over an experience that may be otherwise difficult to accept... [It] is empowering as it increases your sense of control... providing a realization that you have a choice in how you relate to your disability... This freedom of choice boosts our self-esteem and self-confidence” (Brumleve, 2012, para 5).

For anyone that has ever worked with youth, this is an obvious statement. Students in both the general education classroom and the special education classroom love to separate themselves from the stresses of reality and giving them control over their creations increases their feelings of empowerment during stressful times. Unlike the emotional benefit of dealing with reality, the cognitive benefits of art therapy effect more deep-seeded issues. Proof of this has been found through examination of the brain:

“Research demonstrates that traumatic memories are stored in the right hemisphere of the brain, while our verbal capacity is controlled by the left hemisphere of the brain. Art making can promote communication across the two hemispheres of the brain so that a person who has recently sustained a disability is better able to verbally articulate their experience after expressing themselves through art making” (Brumleve, 2012, para 5).

It can be a very difficult to understand the inner workings of the minds of youth who have experienced severe trauma or have a disability. Art therapy allows for better understanding and comprehension (i.e. communication) across the board.

It is imperative that children develop emotionally and intellectually. When the development is hindered and the needs are not met, continued learning and general function ceases. It is imperative that art therapist make this process available to everyone who can benefit from the experience (Dalley et. al., chapter 1987, p.33-34). Beginning the process of implementing art therapy into the classroom can take some time. Luckily, there are many different techniques to achieving this goal for all circumstances. It is always encouraged that educators continue with their own personal education. In order to get certified as an art therapist, one must either go by national or statewide standards. Statewide standards vary, but nationally (in the US), certification requires a Master’s Degree in Psychology and at least 27 quarterly studio art coursework (AATA, 2012). An educator can hire an art therapist to work in the classroom as well. There are two ways for an art therapist to work in a school. The first is to hire an art therapist to work on commission. The second (and least likely, but still encouraged) is to hire a full-time art therapist to work in both the Special Education department and the counseling center. Finally, simply doing the art activities designed for art therapy is a technique anyone can use in the classroom. Art making in and of itself is an amazing experience.

The multiple benefits of art therapy are still being explored, and already so much has been discovered in this new field. Art can help improve the immune system, increase levels of confidence, enhance cognitive development, and even improve social skills. For youth with disabilities and traumatic experiences, these benefits can be milestones. In the end, any child can show developmental improvements through art therapy. It is imperative that educators start implementing it into their lessons. As educators, we want our students to learn, but we also want them to develop. The developmental benefits of art therapy open the door to higher comprehension and learning potential. Why would we prevent this opportunity from occurring?



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