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THE ROLE AND POSITIVE ASPECTS OF ART THERAPY IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Sariqboyeva Zulfiya Yashnarbek qizi
Jo'rayeva Umıdaxon Maxammadjon qizi
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Annotation: This article examines the significance of art therapy in preschool educational organizations and its positive impact on the psychological, emotional, cognitive, social, and physical development of young children. It explores the historical development of art therapy, its theoretical foundations, and its application in contemporary preschool education. Particular attention is paid to the main forms of art therapy, including art-based activities (isotherapy), dance and movement therapy, sand therapy, music therapy, fairy-tale therapy, and drama therapy. The article analyzes how these approaches contribute to children's emotional expression, communication skills, creativity, self-confidence, social adaptation, and personal development. Furthermore, it highlights the potential of art therapy in inclusive education and emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive, safe, and developmentally appropriate educational environment.

Keywords: art therapy, preschool education, preschool children, isotherapy, sand therapy, music therapy, emotional development, creativity, social adaptation, inclusive education, psychological well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Preschool childhood is one of the most important stages in human development. During this period, the foundations of personality, emotional intelligence, communication skills, creative thinking, and social behavior are established. Children gradually learn to recognize their emotions, express their feelings, interact with others, and adapt to different social environments. However, due to the specific characteristics of their age, preschool children are not always able to express their inner experiences, fears, needs, and emotional states verbally.

In this context, art therapy represents an effective educational and developmental approach that enables children to communicate through creative activities. Drawing, painting, modelling, music, movement, storytelling, and role-playing provide opportunities for children to express their feelings and experiences in a natural and accessible way.

Art therapy in preschool educational organizations should be considered not merely as an artistic activity but also as a developmental approach that integrates psychological, pedagogical, and creative methods. Its primary purpose is to create favorable conditions for children's emotional well-being, self-expression, imagination, communication, and social interaction.

The relevance of this topic is determined by the increasing importance of child-centered education, inclusive educational practices, and the development of children's individual abilities. Therefore, the purposeful integration of art therapy into preschool educational activities can contribute to improving educational quality and supporting the comprehensive development of every child.

The historical development and theoretical foundations of art therapy.

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The development of art therapy as an independent field is closely associated with the integration of art, psychology, and medical practice. Although artistic activities have been used for centuries to express human emotions and experiences, the systematic application of art in psychological support developed mainly during the twentieth century.

The term "art therapy" became widely associated with the work of British artist Adrian Hill. In 1938, while receiving treatment for tuberculosis, Hill observed the beneficial effects of drawing and painting on patients' emotional well-being. He subsequently developed the concept of using artistic activities as a means of psychological support and recovery.

Margaret Naumburg, an American educator and psychologist, played an important role in establishing art therapy as a field of psychological practice. She emphasized the significance of spontaneous artistic expression and considered children's drawings and creative products valuable means of understanding their inner experiences.

Another influential figure was Edith Kramer, who highlighted the therapeutic potential of the creative process itself. According to her approach, artistic activity can support emotional development, self-regulation, and personal growth.

The theoretical foundations of art therapy are also connected with the psychological ideas of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. Their approaches to the unconscious, symbols, imagination, and personal experiences influenced the interpretation of artistic expression in psychological practice.

During the second half of the twentieth century, art therapy developed institutionally. In 1969, the American Art Therapy Association was established, contributing to the professional development and recognition of the field.

In contemporary education, art therapy-related activities are increasingly used to support children's emotional development, creativity, communication, and social adaptation. It is important to distinguish between professionally delivered art therapy and educational art-based activities conducted by preschool teachers. The latter should not be presented as clinical treatment or psychological diagnosis.

The role of art therapy in preschool education.

The use of art therapy in preschool educational organizations is based on the principle that children can express their emotions and experiences through different forms of creative activity. Artistic expression provides an alternative communication channel, particularly for children who have limited verbal communication skills or experience difficulties describing their feelings.

The educational value of art therapy can be explained through several interconnected developmental dimensions.

Emotional development. Creative activities help children recognize, express, and regulate their emotions. Through drawing, painting, music, and storytelling, children can communicate feelings such as happiness, sadness, excitement, and anxiety in an age-appropriate manner.

Cognitive development. Art-based activities stimulate imagination, observation, attention, memory, and creative thinking. Selecting colors, combining shapes, constructing images, and creating stories encourage children to explore relationships between objects and events.

Social development. Group artistic activities create opportunities for cooperation, sharing, communication, mutual understanding, and respect for individual differences. Children learn to participate in common projects and appreciate the creative contributions of their peers.

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Physical and motor development. Drawing, modelling, cutting, pasting, and manipulating different materials contribute to the development of fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination. Dance and movement activities support gross motor development, balance, coordination, and body awareness.

Development of self-confidence. When children's creative efforts are accepted without excessive criticism or comparison, they develop a positive attitude towards their abilities. Completing an artistic task can also strengthen their independence and motivation.

Research on art-based and music-based interventions involving children with different developmental needs indicates that these approaches may support social, cognitive, and emotional skills. However, their effectiveness depends on the child's individual characteristics, the quality of implementation, and the professional competence of the adult conducting the activities \(4\).

Main methods of art therapy in preschool educational organizations.

In modern preschool education, different art-based methods can be integrated into educational activities. Each method has its own characteristics and developmental opportunities.

Isotherapy (Visual Art Therapy)

Drawing, painting and visual expression

Isotherapy is one of the most accessible forms of art-based activity for preschool children. It involves drawing, painting, colouring, collage-making, and working with different artistic materials.

During these activities, children are encouraged to express their ideas through colors, shapes, lines, and images. They can create pictures of their families, favorite places, imaginary characters, or natural environments.

The main educational and developmental benefits include:

- Development of imagination and creative thinking.
- Improvement of fine motor skills.
- Development of visual perception and color recognition.
- Encouragement of independent decision-making.
- Opportunities for non-verbal emotional expression.

Teachers should avoid interpreting a child's drawing as definitive evidence of a psychological problem. Instead, they should encourage the child to explain the meaning of the picture in their own words.

Dance and Movement Therapy

Dance and movement activities combine music, rhythm, body movement, and emotional expression. They allow children to communicate through physical movement and develop awareness of their bodies.

For example, teachers can organize activities in which children imitate the movements of animals, represent natural phenomena, or move according to different musical rhythms.

These activities contribute to:

- Development of coordination and balance.
- Improvement of body awareness.
- Development of rhythm and musical perception.
- Encouragement of self-expression.
- Strengthening of group interaction and cooperation.

Movement activities should be adapted to children's physical abilities and should not require identical performance from every participant.

Sand Therapy

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Sand therapy is a creative and sensory approach in which children use sand, water, containers, and miniature objects to construct different scenes and imaginary environments.

Working with sand provides opportunities for sensory exploration, experimentation, and symbolic expression. Children can build houses, gardens, roads, landscapes, and imaginary worlds.

The main developmental benefits of sand-based activities include:

- Stimulation of sensory perception.
- Development of imagination and spatial thinking.
- Improvement of fine motor coordination.
- Encouragement of independent creative decisions.
- Development of cooperation during group activities.

It is important to understand that destroying a sand construction is not necessarily evidence of aggression. Such behavior may simply represent experimentation, curiosity, or a desire to create something new. Teachers should observe children's behavior in context rather than make immediate psychological conclusions.

Music Therapy

Music therapy and music-based educational activities use melodies, rhythm, singing, and musical instruments to support children's emotional and developmental needs.

Music can influence children's mood, encourage relaxation, stimulate movement, and create positive opportunities for communication.

In preschool organizations, music-based activities may include listening to classical and instrumental music, singing familiar songs, playing simple musical instruments, and identifying different rhythms.

The positive aspects of music-based activities include:

- Development of auditory perception.
- Improvement of memory and attention.
- Stimulation of speech and language development.
- Encouragement of emotional expression.
- Development of rhythm and coordination.
- Promotion of group participation.

The selection of music should take into account children's ages, interests, cultural backgrounds, and individual sensory preferences.

Fairy-Tale Therapy and Bibliotherapy

Fairy-tale therapy uses stories, characters, and imaginary situations as a means of supporting children's emotional and social development. Through stories, children become familiar with different emotions, moral values, interpersonal relationships, and possible ways of solving everyday problems.

For instance, a story about friendship can help children understand the importance of kindness, cooperation, and mutual support. Stories about overcoming difficulties can encourage confidence and persistence.

Bibliotherapy, in turn, involves the purposeful use of children's literature and reading activities to encourage reflection, emotional understanding, and positive social behavior.

These approaches contribute to:

- Development of vocabulary and speech.
- Improvement of listening and comprehension skills.
- Development of empathy.

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- Understanding of social norms.
- Stimulation of imagination and creative thinking.

Drama Therapy and Role-Playing Activities

Drama therapy and drama-based educational activities involve role-playing, puppet theatre, dramatization, and the representation of different characters.

Children can act out familiar situations, participate in short performances, and create their own stories. Through these activities, they learn to communicate, express ideas, and understand different social roles.

The main benefits include:

- Development of oral communication.
- Improvement of self-expression.
- Strengthening of confidence.
- Development of empathy and cooperation.
- Improvement of creative and imaginative abilities.

In educational settings, drama-based activities should be organized in a supportive atmosphere where participation is voluntary and children are not pressured to perform.

The importance of art therapy in inclusive preschool education.

One of the important directions in contemporary preschool education is the development of inclusive educational environments. Inclusive education aims to provide equal opportunities for all children, regardless of their individual developmental characteristics or educational needs.

Art-based activities are particularly valuable in inclusive groups because they offer different ways of participating. A child who experiences difficulties with verbal communication may express ideas through drawing, music, movement, modelling, or visual materials.

Art therapy-related activities can support:

1. Communication between children with different developmental abilities.
2. Development of mutual respect and acceptance.
3. Participation in common creative projects.
4. Reduction of communication barriers.
5. Recognition of each child's individual strengths and abilities.

For example, during a collective drawing activity, children can contribute through different tasks according to their abilities. One child may select colors, another may draw shapes, while another may arrange or attach visual elements.

Such activities create an environment in which cooperation and participation are more important than the comparison of individual results.

At the same time, children with significant emotional or developmental difficulties may require individualized support from qualified specialists. Art-based educational activities should complement, rather than replace, professional psychological, pedagogical, or medical assistance.

pedagogical conditions for the effective application of art therapy

The successful integration of art therapy into preschool education requires appropriate organizational and pedagogical conditions.

First, the educational environment should be safe, comfortable, and rich in age-appropriate creative materials. Children should have access to paper, paints, pencils, clay, sand, musical instruments, books, and other educational resources.

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Second, teachers should consider children's individual characteristics, interests, developmental levels, and emotional needs. The same activity may produce different experiences and outcomes for different children.

Third, artistic activities should emphasize the creative process rather than the quality or perfection of the final product. Children should be allowed to experiment, make independent choices, and express their ideas freely.

Fourth, educators should maintain positive communication with parents and, where necessary, cooperate with psychologists, speech therapists, special education teachers, and other professionals.

Fifth, the effectiveness of art-based activities should be evaluated through systematic pedagogical observation, children's participation, communication, creativity, and changes in their interaction with others.

The following table summarizes the main methods and their educational significance.

Table 1. Main methods of art therapy and their developmental potential in preschool education

Method	Main activities	Developmental potential
Isotherapy	Drawing, painting, collage	Creativity, fine motor skills, emotional expression
Dance and movement	Rhythmic movement, dance, imitation	Coordination, body awareness, social interaction
Sand therapy	Sand modelling, constructing scenes	Sensory development, imagination, spatial thinking
Music therapy	Singing, listening, playing instruments	Auditory perception, memory, emotional expression
Fairy-tale therapy	Storytelling, reading, discussion	Speech, empathy, social understanding
Drama therapy	Role-playing, puppet theatre	Communication, confidence, cooperation

Source: Compiled by the author based on the theoretical analysis of art therapy and early childhood educational approaches.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of art therapy methods demonstrates that creative activities can become an important component of the educational process in preschool organizations. Their value lies in the possibility of combining learning, emotional expression, social interaction, and creative exploration.

The approaches developed by Adrian Hill, Margaret Naumburg, and Edith Kramer provide important theoretical foundations for understanding the relationship between artistic expression and psychological well-being. In particular, Naumburg emphasized the communicative function of children's artistic images, while Kramer focused on the developmental and supportive value of the creative process itself \(1; 2; 3\).

Contemporary research also highlights the potential of art-based and music-based interventions for children with different developmental needs. A systematic review published in 2024 examined the application of art therapy and music therapy in supporting children with autism spectrum disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, language disorders, and learning difficulties \(4\).

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Nevertheless, the effectiveness of art therapy should not be understood as automatic or identical for every child. It depends on the appropriate selection of methods, the educational environment, the teacher's professional competence, and the individual characteristics of children.

Therefore, art therapy should be integrated into preschool education through a systematic, child-centered, and inclusive approach. Its application should be based on pedagogical objectives, ethical principles, and cooperation between educators, parents, and qualified specialists.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Art therapy plays an important role in creating favorable conditions for the comprehensive development of preschool children. The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that artistic activities can support children's emotional expression, creativity, communication, cognitive development, and social adaptation.

The main advantage of art therapy is that it provides children with opportunities to express themselves through different forms of creative activity, even when they experience difficulties communicating their feelings verbally.

The use of isotherapy, dance and movement activities, sand-based creative work, music, fairy tales, and drama can enrich the educational process and contribute to the development of children's individual abilities.

Art therapy-related methods are also valuable in inclusive preschool education because they create opportunities for children with different developmental characteristics to participate in common creative activities.

Based on the theoretical analysis, the following recommendations can be proposed:

1. Art-based activities should be systematically incorporated into the educational programmes of preschool organizations.
2. Teachers should receive appropriate methodological training in the use of creative and art-based developmental approaches.
3. Special creative spaces should be established in preschool organizations, providing children with access to various artistic materials.
4. Art-based activities should be adapted to children's ages, interests, individual abilities, and developmental needs.
5. Cooperation between preschool teachers, psychologists, parents, and special education professionals should be strengthened.
6. Particular attention should be paid to inclusive creative activities that encourage cooperation and equal participation.
7. The effectiveness of implemented activities should be assessed through pedagogical observation and developmentally appropriate evaluation methods.

In conclusion, art therapy represents a valuable pedagogical and psychological resource for modern preschool education. Its purposeful and professionally appropriate application can contribute to creating a supportive educational environment in which every child has opportunities to express individuality, develop creativity, establish positive relationships, and realize personal potential.

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