

Art Therapy As A Tool For Comprehensive Educational System In India – From Experiences To Practices Towards Evolving A Roadmap

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ABSTRACT

Art Therapy is viewed as 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. 'Art therapy is based on the belief that the creative process involved in the making of art is healing and life enhancing' (American Art Therapy Association, 2005). Through creating art and reflecting on the process and product of art, people can experience increased awareness of self and others. The Art Therapist can enable the client to reflect his/her own emotions, feelings and thoughts in a non-intrusive approach. S/he can also help the clients to cope with the distressing symptoms, stress, and traumatic experiences through the process. In addition, the art therapist can enhance cognitive abilities of the clients, especially children, adolescents and youth, and make them to enjoy the life through the process of making an art. The art therapist has an understanding of the art experience from psychological and aesthetic perspectives. The Psychologist, who uses art therapy as a tool, could assist the clients in building an internal sense of self-awareness through their artwork and personal reactions to the work. Art therapy has a knowledge base grounded in theories of personality, human development, psychology, family systems and art education. For several years, art has been used as a tool for informal and formal communication. It has been used as the means of group interaction, conflict resolution, diagnosis and self-expression. The therapeutic use of art diversity echoes the varieties of artistic experience and needs. It has been used as a symbolical vehicle to capture the inexpressible through different images.

1. INTRODUCTION

In India, art therapy has been evolved in the recent years only. According to the Indian culture and traditions, sending the children to learn arts such as music, dance, painting and instrumental music, etc. at their early stage of lives has been very common and demanding. There are several organizations in the country which are practicing art based therapy and expressive art therapeutic techniques. Art therapy can be used in groups and individuals such as children with disabilities, adolescents who experience mood variations, young girls and women in care and protection home, persons with terminal illness, victims/survivors of trafficking, persons with mental illness, etc. In India, very few centers have been conducting and processing such therapeutic techniques towards bringing a progressive development among the clients and others. Through this paper, the author analyzes the application of Art Therapy as a tool for comprehensive educational system in India by, drawing extensively from the experiences to practices. The author made effective use of her work as a Counselling Psychologist with some understanding of Art Therapy in an organization with a child care and protection centre, carry out the rapid analysis of two cases (one boy and a girl), and then put forward her findings and suggestions leading to policy formulation by the Governments. It is expected that this paper will bring out the significance of application of art therapy as a tool that enhances the different initiatives and interventions taken up towards revamping of the educational system in India.

RATIONALE

The paper makes a modest attempt to signify the effective use of art therapy tools and techniques on few adolescents in a child care and protection centre in an Indian State. The author analyses two cases, share her practical experiences in handling them, highlight the significance of using art therapy techniques as an effective tool for counselling the children, adolescents and youth, and put forward the arguments for incorporating the same in the educational system of our country at appropriate levels. This study is expected to create the due space for art therapy interventions, spread awareness on art therapy techniques, tools and assessment methods, and to enhance its use in research on the population in general and with special reference to children, adolescents and youth. While carrying out extensive review of literature, it is noted that there are very less research studies were undertaken in the field of art therapy in India. In addition, the limited research conducted in the country, could not show case the therapeutic intervention as one of the best approaches that can be used by the counselors, counselling psychologists, therapists, clinical psychologists, community health workers (especially in mental health),etc.

Ramotara (2012) has done a research study on ‘Effect of art therapy and social skills training on behavioral problems and adjustment among children with conduct disorder’. The study was experimental in design, with two experimental groups and one control group. The population for the study comprised of boys of VII class in the age group of 13-15 years. The sample size for the study was 90, drawn from private schools of Chandigarh and Mohali. During the study, two interventions (social skill training and art therapy) were used. The significant difference in the pre-test and post-test scores has shown that the two interventions were successful in reducing conduct disorders in the subjects that affect their academic achievements. The study results were found to be supportive in helping the individuals to recognize the need for change and then help them to display better behavioral choices to develop i.e. appropriate overt behaviors.

Akhila (2017) carried out a study on ‘Effect of art therapy intervention among adolescent emotional wellbeing’. The study was carried out to identify adolescents at risk for emotional well-being through their drawings and to study the effectiveness of intervention through art therapy, and their emotions and cognition and their contribution of art and art therapy modalities to enhance their life situations. The study was conducted on 44 adolescents who were selected after administering Silver’s Draw A Story (DAS) test consisting of stimulus drawings. Those clients were encouraged to pick up any two pictures from the given drawings, made to explain their experiences through these pictures, and motivated to manifest what is happening in them in a casual but professional manner. By the use of DAS rating instrument, emotional content, self-image, and humour rating of the pre-test were performed in the clients. Additionally, the ratings of aggression, depression, and positive cognition were computed based on the rating scale developed by the researcher, which is related to the emotional content of the DAS rating instrument.

The sample was divided into experimental and control groups, with 22 samples in each group. In the second phase, 44 adolescents were divided into clusters of two homogeneous units as experimental and control groups based on the cut-off value (score range: 1-5 and cut-off value: 3) of their mean scores in the pre-test. Art therapy interventions of ten phases with a gap of 20 days were administered to the adolescents in the experimental group only, after which a post-test of the DAS was run for both the groups.

The results show that art therapy intervention could significantly contribute to enhance the well-being of adolescents. It was noticed that adolescents were very much eager and enthusiastic to participate in the study, due to its innovative approach and procedures. The cause of intervention had equal impact on boys and girls. Life-enhancing well-being was found less in a number of adolescents prior to administration of art therapy. A low self-esteem, aggression, depression, and positive cognition were observed in 15 male and 7 female adolescents, which were enhanced considerably through art interventions. Beyond these two studies, no study could be identified in the Indian context, though there is no dearth of studies about use of art, craft, music, dance, drama, etc. It is significant to note that number of research studies on art therapy was undertaken in foreign countries. However, the socio-economic parameters of the target group in those studies were totally different in comparison with India. The author had no hesitation in mentioning that most of the studies undertaken outside India could not be found relevant to be referred here, as the context in which the studies were conducted were totally different from ours.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objective of the paper is to study the uses of Art therapy as a tool for comprehensive educational system in India. Subsequently, the author would like to recommend suggestions towards enhancing its reach and extent in the country.

3. METHODOLOGY

Case study (single subject research) has been used here. The research design has been visualized as multiple base line designs where use of multiple (more than two) base lines were incorporated for allowing the replication of the experiment to ascertain the real worth of the intervention or treatment introduced to the subject under study (McGee, et.al.,1986). The multiple base line design has been preferred here, as that will provide sufficient space for the clients to choose the medium of art. In addition, the clients are made to work in a multi-modal approach, where the freedom to choose and incorporate the diverse techniques was left to the wisdom of the art therapist, considering the appropriateness of the scenario.

A BRIEF ABOUT THE STUDY AREA

The experiences from which this paper was formulated were drawn from exposure received by the author while working in an international NGO that works for Child Care and Protection Centre (CCPC). The author was performing the functions as a Counselling Psychologist and Art Therapist (in the designation of Management Trainee) in the Family Strengthening Programme (FSP) of the NGO in Thrissur, Kerala. As part of the FSP, the target group was 500 that include 300 children who were residing in the 'Village' and 200 children living outside the village. That organization has been working towards bringing a holistic development of the children who were brought to the CCPC at varying demographic levels, socio-economic backgrounds and other pressing situations that include referrals from the law and order authorities. The children were accommodated in a typical home and family setting, unlike the 'usual' Child Protection homes that were run by the Government and non-Government agencies. The care of a 'Mother' and 'Aunty' used to be provided to each child during their stay in the house. These care takers were selected from unmarried women, separated, divorcee or widow, and will be given the responsibility of bringing up 9-12 children staying in one independent 'home'. It is noted that several children living in the CCPC were brought to the centre during their infancy or early childhood itself. It is also significant to mention that many

of them come from disturbed families, vulnerable settings, pressing societal pressures, etc. Hence, the significance of taking up a study involving the inmates of the CCPC was taken up.

4. DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS

The study undertaken by the author in the inmates of the CCPC gave wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of the socio-economic-psychological setting of the clients, the role of the society including the educational institution in their shaping up, etc. Within the limited period of stay, the author was providing limited psychological support to number of inmates of the CCPC to overcome their stress, personal issues and act as a motivator. However, here the case analysis is limited to two adolescents only, who were part of the sessions using art therapy. Each case was looked at using different lenses, as individual approaches have to be essentially given in the practice, analysis and documentation as indicated below. .

CASE 1

AB is a boy of 11 years, who was living with his parents and two other siblings (one younger boy and a younger girl) in an area, bordering Tamil Nadu. His dad used to work as a daily wage labourer and mother used to be employed as a house maid. AB is tall boy with thin and browned skin. He was very active and was interested in sports and other co-curricular activities. The family was living in very poor socio-economic state. Father used to consume liquor and other substances abuse issues and he used to physically abuse his wife, and the mother of AB. He and his siblings used to observe these happenings on a daily basis. Thought they felt very bad seeing the plight of their mother, but could not muster courage to force the father to stop abusing her as that may have invited beatings to them as well. He was good in his studies before few incidents happened in his life. He was brought to the International NGO in 2015 along with his brother and sister. Child Welfare Commission (CWC), Govt. of Kerala referred him and his siblings to the centre for care and protection. When he was brought to the organization, he was noticed to be very smart, adjusting and well mannered. In the beginning, he was put through home schooling for about two months. Then he was admitted to a school, that was located few kilo metres away from the CCPC/home. It was observed that he socialized well with most of the children in the village. He is a very talented boy as he could sing, dance and draw pictures. It was also noted that he is not much interested in studies and special tuitions are given for him. But, he couldn't learn or remember anything whatever is taught to him either in the school or private tuition.

His admission to the CCPC/home was done after a systematic social investigation, carried out by a co-worker and House in-charge of the Organisation. As part of the social investigation, it was learned that AB was living with his parents and his siblings in Tamil Nadu for several years. His father was an alcoholic and used to physically abuse his mother as a 'ritual' almost on a daily basis. One day, he became totally out of control and exceeded all the limits of civility and killed his wife. In addition, he also set the house on fire, which was done in front of AB and his young brother and sister. The Police arrested his father and subsequently, AB and his siblings were found on a railway station from where they were picked up and handed over to the CWC. AB drew a picture for an art competition held inside the Organisation, which turned out to be the reason for choosing him as one of the cases for this study. He is noticed to be an expressive person with reference to arts. Even though he used to make conversation freely with the author, he never used to really open up about his underlying issues and other troubles that used to bother him and his siblings. In the picture he drew as part of the competition, it was the portrayal of setting of a house on fire, one dead body at the site, one boy standing and a knife.

This picture made me to consider taking him as a subject for 'art therapy intervention' in the CCPC and to start my interventions with him. As he responded well to my queries on his picture, the author felt that the art therapy may work as a tool to work with him and enable him to come out of his 'hidden issues'. In the picture mentioned before, he has depicted his past experiences using very dark shades of orange and red colors. Before starting the first interactive session with him, the art therapist spoke to him and received his consent to work with his 'covered feelings and issues' as that was part of the customary procedures and ethical practices as a Counselling Psychologist.

AB was very comfortable with me as a Counselling Psychologist, but he didn't want to talk about his past with me, despite several efforts made. After identifying his interests and skills in drawing and to enable him to express suppressed thoughts, feelings, and emotions, it was decided to introduce art therapy as a tool in the counselling sessions for him. As a procedure, the meeting was scheduled thrice a week and the meeting was organized in a separate room, specially earmarked for counselling sessions to be conducted in a confidential manner. It is very important to have the privacy for such meetings and he was given space to work on himself and heal by self. He love to work with colors so the session was started with his own drawn pictures where he could explain what he meant by those pictures. After explaining and analyzing several pictures, he was asked to share his feelings about the picture that he drew for the competition held in the NGO in which depiction of fire, dead body, etc. was made by him. While explaining the picture, even without realizing that he was revealing the bad incidents in his life happened, he opened up. During the session that happened after several sittings he shared his past story of his father murdering his mother and putting the house on fire in a fully drunken state of mind. During the accident, his younger sister also suffered burns in her hands. Police took his father into their custody and AB, his younger brother and young sister ended up in the railway station, as they had no other place to go. He was wandering here and there with his young sister and brother. Finally police questioned them and handed over to CWC, Thrissur who handed over their care and protection to the CCPC/Home. While he was explaining the picture which was drawn by him, it was noticed the amount of anger he has on Father. He was very angry on his dad and he expressed the same by depicting that a boy, knife, fire and a man.

The next session was planned and he was allowed to take any medium of art where he was asked to draw anything, which he can relate with his anger. He again used dark colors and also was given some clay and instructed to make something which he can relate with his current anger feeling. And slowly, the session was moved to express his anger by movements where he was instructed to create a movement, which shows anger. In the next session, he was again asked to draw his current feelings and enact. The subsequent sessions were found to be working on him slowly as he was able to sit for study and control the anger drastically. In this case study and analysis, the client was not imposed to follow any particular art medium by the Counselling Psychologist. His interest was given the priority to choose the medium of work so that the process doesn't follow any usual pattern as experimenting design. The art is used as a tool in the counselling sessions and to enable him to come out, manifest and heal by himself. And all these were made to happen over a period of several sessions, through which he was able to assimilate the changes happening in him and control his anger over a period of time. The sessions with the client lasted for the duration of three weeks. Meeting twice a week and two hours of session was practiced with the client with the permission of the house in-charge. At the end of each session, AB was able to connect well with himself and he showed positive changes and started studying. He had a negativity towards the studies, which was probably made out of his frustration and anger towards the past memories. As he was able to remind of his bad memories in the past slowly and steadily without an intrusive approach by the

Counselling Psychologist. After the sessions, he used to sit for study and was able to concentrate on his work. He does not feel frustrated anymore and now he is able to control his anger to a great extent. He is able to sit and read books for a long time and started performing well in the class, as known from his teachers in the school, house mother and house i/c.

CASE 2

XY is a girl of 10 years. She used to live with her grandfather and aunty in the southern part of Kerala. She lost her parents as they committed suicide. Their socio-economic status was very poor and they couldn't pay back the loans they took from different persons for meeting various domestic requirements. As they could not repay the soft loans even several months after the dead line, they were abused by those people who have provided the loan. On several occasions, they were even insulted in front of all neighbours, in their place of living. And then they decided to end up their lives as they found it hard to live further. After the sudden demise of parents, XY was under the protection of grandfather and aunty. She started scoring poor marks in the exams and then teachers enquired the reason. She said she is not able to sleep during nights, as she feels uncomfortable. She didn't share anything to the teachers. However, one of the teachers happened to share with her aunt about the poor performance of the girl. One day, the aunt found that her own grandfather was sexually abusing her. The aunty didn't know how to react to this and then, she went in front of Child Welfare Commission and conveyed that she cannot take further responsibility of the child. Through the CWC, the girl XY reached this international NGO. She was only 8 years old when she was brought to the CCPC/ Home and now she is about 10 years. She was seen to be a very introvert girl. Though she studies well, but she was not social with even family members. She was referred to me by her house in-charge to talk to her and do something to bring changes. When the author had the first conversation with her, she seems to only answer the questions put up to her using limited words. It was known that she likes to play alone and especially with sand. In art therapy, sand is also used as a therapeutic technique. In this context, as part of the procedures for counselling, sand was introduced to her along with other mediums of art, but she chooses to play with sand.

While playing the sand I have asked her to use various animal toys while working in the sand. She found that idea very much interesting and she arranged the animal toys in the sand in a certain way. She chose three animal toys during that session - rabbit, snake and buffalo. While arranging them in sand, she placed them in a unique way. She has hidden the rabbit inside the mud, the snake was placed near to the rabbit and buffalo was kept far away from the snake. The sequence of placing the animal toys as part of the play in the sand was very curious and significant. During the discussions with her, she explained that the rabbit was scared of the snake always. She even explained that the buffalo was just wandering here and there and it was not bothered about anything. Whenever the buffalo sees the rabbit, it used to scream as if to convey something to it, which makes the rabbit much more scared. The sessions with XY were held twice in a week for about six weeks. During each session, the Counselling Psychologist gave various aspects about her during the past and she was made to prepare slowly by herself to come out of the fear. She was also feeling bad as her aunt scolded her saying she is responsible for all those things happened with the grandfather. She was made to believe that the abuse happened because of her mistake. She was strongly holding that belief and that fear of socializing with others was very well there with XY. She feared that if she socializes further, similar incidents will happen again in her life. Through the play therapy and sand therapy through various counseling sessions, the Counselling Psychologist helped her to overcome the feeling of low self-esteem and self-blaming behavior. It is significant to mention that in the last session with her using animal toys, she made the rabbit to come out of the sand home and bite

the snake in open. This is nothing but the manifestation of mustering the courage by her, by which she has acquired the confidence to react and respond to such situations in future.

5. MAJOR FINDINGS

- Art therapy could be used an effective tool to reveal the hidden thoughts, feelings, and emotions using various art forms, as applicable to each case.
- Art therapy approach is very much child friendly and fast healing and would be very much appropriate in the counselling sessions with those who have some interest and inclination to portray their emotions appropriately.
- Art therapy has been able to penetrate to such in-depth issues effortlessly and it has opened up the issues before the Psychologist unconsciously by the client.
- This approach has helped to create a strong rapport between the client and the Counselling Psychologist as it turned to be an effective intervention tool.
- This therapeutic technique creates lot of space for the client to express their issues, problems using various art medium and it also helped to heal by themselves through the medium, facilitated by the Psychologist.
- Art therapy technique will improve the creativity of the client as there is no compulsion to the client to make the art or use it in a certain form. It has been a process art and it is evaluated based on the art form they made.
- Art therapy can used among any age group especially with disabled, cognitive impairment, trafficking survivors, child sexual abuse cases, autism, people with elderly issues, etc.
- It is a wonderful tool which can be used during counseling sessions according to the interests of the client in a non-intrusive approach.
- If the client finds it difficult to share his/her problems, this tool could be used to create the rapport and make the client reveal the problem unconsciously.
- Art therapy has the inherent potentials to be effectively used in children, adolescent and youth who are not able to focus on their studies due to some incidents in the past.

6. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the case analysis and findings drawn out of the limited cases dealt by the Counselling Psychologist, it is suggested that Art therapy could be widely used in different settings like Child care and protection homes, Juvenile homes, special schools, Pain and palliative care homes, Old age homes, etc. It is noted that the sessions on art therapy could be effectively used on for differently abled children, child sexual abuse cases, victims/ survivors of trafficking, terminally ill patients, aged population who could not convey through formal conversation, etc. It is also suggested that the Union Government and the State Governments take necessary policy measures to effectively incorporate use of Art therapy as part of Counselling procedures in our country, especially in the educational policy, health policy, policy on mental health, youth policy, etc. During the policy formulation, presence of Psychologists, Art Therapy experts, etc., could be invariably be involved to incorporate their comments and suggestions towards factoring into the policy document and the policy execution. Counseling Psychologist could be encouraged to use Art therapy more widely while dealing with cases involving children, adolescents and youth, as it could be very effective in taking necessary interventions during the counseling sessions.

7. CONCLUSION

The Art therapy techniques and tools could be a 'game changer' in the field of Educational guidance and counselling which has the potentials to bring in holistic changes in the educational system in the country. Being non-judgmental and non-intrusive, use of art therapy techniques in a multi-modal approach, the clients, irrespective of their demographic features, could be able to be more expressive and share their thoughts, feelings and emotions effortlessly.

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