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# Therapy Emotions Artistic

## Becoming An Art Therapist

“ Art therapy is a type of psychotherapy that encourages the expression of emotions through artistic activities such as painting, drawing or sculpture; psychotherapy based on the belief that the creative process involved in the making of art is healing and life-enhancing” (Webster’s Dictionary). Art therapy opens a creative world for those who cannot express the way they feel by use of verbal communication. To some people, are not enough.

Expression through painting, sculpting, and drawing assists one in overcoming the effects of traumatic or unpleasant happenings in his life. Art therapy is a field that is beneficial to people of all ages, gender, emotional status, or mental ability. It is necessary to examine the knowledge of products resulting from and various methods utilized in a variety of disciplines in order to fully understand the vast benefits of implementing art therapy (Repko, 2005).

It is used for a wide variety of conditions such as: the terminally ill, mentally challenged, emotionally disturbed, those afflicted with eating disorders, the abused both physically and verbally, and many more. The goal of Art Therapy is free and open expression, emotional well-being, mental stability and well-balanced coping skills for the client.

In the profession of Psychology, use of Art Therapy is considered a most crucial component in evaluating, diagnosing and treating patients. Analysis of a person’s psyche and mental health is often difficult with the single use <https://assignbuster.com/therapeutic-value-of-art-and-history-of-art-therapytherapy-emotions-artisticnbackgroundnreferences/>

of verbal communication. The use of art in healing dates back to the ancient drawings on walls of caves, revealing that although the profession of Art Therapy appears very young in the family of mental health disciplines it is very old and personally natural in practice.

There is even evidence that the creative act of art may have prevented or forestalled more serious mental disorders for painters such as Blake, Munch or Van Gogh (McNiff, 1980). Patients who are given the opportunity to free themselves of inhibitions stemming from inner hesitations of new experiences, parental influences, cultural or economic are able to express deep fears, even fantasies or wishes through the expression of art.

It is the symbolic language of images that initiates the surfacing of feelings and emotions that one often cannot or dares not to express verbally (Meltzer, 1948). As people outgrow inhibitions their personalities are freed and they can express and project feelings as well as face events that once disturbed them.

In therapy, the developmental stages of art expression go from quite restricted and simplistic stereotypic models to images with actual faces or events expressed. Frustrated or once disassociated personalities are released and reintegrated through the use of art expression (McNiff, 1948).

Art is often neglected as a serious academic subject in educational institutions. However, with further investigation it can compliment even the most difficult educational programs. Art is important to every student, but especially in programs educating handicapped or exceptional children. J.

Dewey expressed in his drive to develop humanness in exceptional children  
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that "...artistic activity is the way in which one may gain in strength and stature, the belief in his own powers, and the self respect which makes artistic activity constructive in the growth of personality" (Dewey, 1970 as cited in Integration of Art Education into Special Education Programs, 1976, n. p.).

Curiosity is emerging about the therapeutic values of art, where once there was an emphasis on cognition art is becoming recognized as beneficial in the development and growth of individuals. The goal of both art therapist and art teacher is for an individual to realize his full ego. Teachers and therapists strive to master techniques which affect and develop the inner psyche of students.

Margaret Naumburg was the first educator who had a sophisticated understanding of the importance of art in education. She incorporated free art expression into her work and published writings about her experiences. Teachers joined clinicians and educators in institutions dealing with handicapped, the bereaved and the mentally ill (Rubin, 1980).

Intense and long-term education with clinical practice is required for an Art Therapist to obtain certification. The very nature of altering one's personality or well-being in therapy necessitates the seriousness in consideration of the academic and practical preparation of an art therapist.

The American Art Therapy Association was formed to regulate and determine and delineate the degree of education and training of art therapists.

Standards of registration include strict guidelines with requirements

including a master's program with a highly valued emphasis on graduate  
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training under the supervision and tutelage of art therapists and psychotherapists within clinical settings (McNiff, 1980).

A wide variety of disciplines could be examined to understand the value of Art Therapy . Some are: sociology, psychology , economics , art and education . The scope of this paper will focus on how art therapy is used in analyzing the psychological health of patients and treatment of; the development of individuality through art incorporated into education; and the aesthetic value of expression through the creative act of art. The most critical disciplines to determine the benefits of Art Therapy incorporated into its goal are *psychology, art, and education*.

Examining the perspective of psychology will allow understanding of how a person can be evaluated for emotional and mental health, and methods of treatment prescribed to achieve the ultimate of balanced well-being through the use of the creative act. Psychology is the science of the status of the mind and its processes. Many conditions and happenings in life affect an individual's physical and mental health. It is imperative to evaluate and prescribe the most beneficial methods of treatment to achieve this balance of mental status.

Examining the perspective of art will reveal how expression of emotion and experience within the freedom of verbal communication has a healing affect on an individual and can rid him of past traumas or harmful experiences that prevent ultimate health. Art is the production of what is appealing, considered beautiful or that which is of more than ordinary significance. The avenue of communication through this type of creative expression enhances

all individuals who utilize it. Not only is aesthetic value received through artistic expression, rather the therapeutic value far outweighs the former benefits.

Finally, in looking at the perspective of education may explain why there is a necessity of years of academic instruction and clinical practice to obtain the certification of art therapy. Education is considered the intellectual preparation for mature life through acquiring knowledge. Its goal is to develop the power to reason based on knowledge and instruction that is imparted to the student. The profession of Art Therapy requires many years of academic study as well as clinical study and internship to obtain certification. Intense focus is on the importance of proper study and training to perform art therapy with an individual.

Research of articles, journals and literary information pertaining to each discipline will be conducted. Products of the three disciplines mentioned concerning art therapy will be discussed such as American Art Therapy Association standards and requirements, artistic work of individuals before and after treatment, and exhibits of artistic expression from a variety of painters. The effectiveness of art therapy will also be revealed through drawings and paintings exhibited by different artists and individuals.

The purpose of this paper is to reveal the therapeutic value of free expression in drawing, sculpting and the use of images; how art expands the imagination and educational scope of children and adults; and how the development of personality and character is affected when allowed expression through non- verbal means. By looking at similarities in the end

product of individuals through various disciplines, the benefits of implementing art therapy will be revealed.

## **Background**

Art Therapy (All in bold will be defined in Appendix A) began its history in the 1930s in America because of the efforts of Margaret Naumburg. In thirty years it developed into seven courses taught in five institutions by four art therapists including Ms. Naumburg. By 1971 four programs offered master's degrees in art therapy. These degrees were offered in universities, a medical college and a college known for its fine arts studies.

Single courses in art therapy were offered across the country in academic institutions as supplemental education. The historical background of art therapy began very slowly with seemingly nothing happening and then it developed with great speed (Agell, 1980).

In the early development of art therapy professionals used it as case work for treating children with behavioral problems in residencies and special schools, hospitalized patients and private clients. " Art therapists who, convinced of the special qualities inherent in art, persuaded others – artists, teachers, and clinicians – that art expression provided an enduring, moving, and sometimes exquisite message of human experience" (Agell, 1980, p. 9).

During the pioneering days, many therapists had been doing art therapy but didn't know what to call the process or results of something special that was happening in their work.

Elinor Utman founded the American Journal of Art Therapy in 1961. This publication provided information regarding the therapeutic use of art in professions. It also enabled art therapists who had formerly been isolated to be unified. This ultimately led to the founding of the American Art Therapy Association (AATA) in 1969 that gave therapists a structure for promoting their field of work, and its ultimate priority was to support the training development of art therapists.

Two documents, *Guidelines for Art Therapy Training* and *Guidelines* were created to provide the fundamental standards for training and the educational level required for certification of art therapy. It was determined that professional certification should be with a Master's degree with recommended didactic and practicum experience (Agell, 1980).

Art therapy has developed into four categories: recreational, occupation, general therapeutic and actual art therapy. These types of therapy are typically used with a variety of patients; the most intensive application of the therapy was used on institutionalized tubercular patients. Handicrafts and major arts were used to aid in the depression caused by elongated institutionalization.

Physically handicapped patients were trained how to use other limbs or a different set of learning functions. Neurologically impaired patients such as those with cerebral palsy, mongoloid or the blind experienced the benefit of release or development of a satisfactory degree of intellectual functioning through the creative act of art.



Those with mental and psychologically deviant conditions experienced art therapy as a therapeutic process and sometimes as a curative process. Art therapy was used for the occupational benefit as well as for enjoyment.

“ With the retarded and pathological child we have begun to realize the great help that can be gained from art psychotherapy in the youngest age group (Harms, 1975, p. 242). Research in progress shows that we ought first to distinguish between intellectual and perceptive learning. An impaired child will comprehend a branch of green leaves or a flower much more readily if it is not only explained to him but if he also has drawn it with crayons. The creative method of comprehending is not only much simpler but also reaches deeper into the apperceptive nature of the young child” (Harms, 1975, p. 242).

Development of Art therapy is used for people with health issues. Anna, age twelve, is a patient who came to treatment after having suffered many traumatic experiences due to a heart defect. She endured five major cardiac surgeries and had many problems that compounded her condition other than the physical difficulties. Having been sexually abused by a family member she exhibited difficulty coping with her feelings about the issues in her life causing stomach aches and a lack in friendships.

Anna’s treatment included art therapy and resulted in better management of her anxiety and depression. A part of her treatment was to create a collage to draw out the subconscious feelings she had reached regarding her life issues. The focus of treatment and healing was her serious medical condition along with abuses. Anna’s depiction of herself in the collage was a figure

with a large head and small body shown in the center of the paper. She had cut out magazine and placed the “ good” describing herself on the right of her head and to the left, the “ bad”.

It was determined that she could not see both sides as a part of the whole head indicating she viewed herself as divided. It was only through art instead of traditional verbal therapy that this depiction of self was revealed. Though she was initially unaware of the divided view of herself through art therapy she reached a measure of healing resulting in healthier coping skills. This was confirmed by the change of images in her art, proving the benefit of art in treatment as well as recovery (Lees, 2003-2005).

Victims of violent physical abuse also benefit from art therapy in that they are able to express in images horrible experiences that are either no longer conscious or are too painful to verbalize. As a sexual abuse survivor Susan exhibited a common theme of confusion of feelings and devaluation of self that is often only revealed through art. Art therapy reveals through images the impact the violence of sexual abuse creates.

The first drawing of Susan reflected her pain with a single tear on an expressionless face. Her torment was silent, but through continued use of art she was able to express her suppressed emotions and the feelings that overwhelmed her. Progressive pictures depicted images of her feelings of loneliness and helplessness. Art allowed Susan to step outside herself and view what her feelings look like. This was a step used for her to learn how to own her true feelings. Through art she was able to see herself as a grown woman with an inner child.

The colors in her art turned from black and colorless to vibrant and vivid. Emotions of anger appeared after the fifth drawing and as art drawings continued through treatment deeper emotions were depicted in the images and color selection. Through art therapy Susan was able to work through the steps of healing which brought hope of a new life without the pain from past experiences (Lees, 2003-2005).

A third use of art therapy is with people who have challenges living in the normal realm of life. Children with autism benefit from art therapy by the opportunity to express and communicate with the world through images since they often cannot verbally. Sung, a Korean five year old girl, was filmed with a 35 mm camera to determine the benefit of art in autistic children. In her first session she became familiarized with the supplies used in art - sketchbook and a box of bright wax craypas.

Her first drawings were banana-like arcs with heavy lines or large solid dots also containing rectangular patches. Other forms come and go in her depictions. Eventually she became “mesmerized by activity which fills her entire visual field and is absorbed by the deepening color and her rapidly moving hand seen from scant inches away” (Kellman, 2004, p. 13). Sung’s art developed into additional shapes and a common images of heads with big solid eye dots and facial features. As time went on her pictures became more detailed including bodies with clothes and thinner lines. Paints and origami were introduced which developed dexterity.

She was able to develop keen vision with spatial capacities as well as the control of fine motor skills. Her art revealed that autistic children frequently “

focus on the geometric structure of a visual scene and on the forms and structures of objects themselves in their drawings” (Kellman, 2004, p. 16).

Sung was developing her available skills through art.

Art therapy has developed into an essential and beneficial form of treatment and therapy. The above three scenarios prove the variety of uses in the expressive language of art. People with physical, mental or emotional difficulties are able to heal or develop with the use of art expression. The extent of healing/development can be measured through the progression of detail in the images. The scope of treatment is determined by the extent or type of art medium necessary. From its beginning in the 1930s, art therapy has developed and become recognized as an authentic therapy to assist people through a variety of disciplines.

The objective of this paper is to explain how to become a successful art therapist by showing examples of treatments and giving the guidelines of the educational process. Integrating several disciplines forms a holistic, comprehensive understanding of how to accomplish this profession by using the Comprehensive Perspectives Model (Repko, 2005). Psychology not only benefits the therapist but is also the core reason patients turn to art therapy.

Having a background in psychology will give an understanding of the brain and gives insights of how to cope and treat the issue. Art consists of the therapeutic process of learning to show emotion by using drawing pencils, paints and clay for sculpturing. Any individual can benefit from art alone because it subconsciously uses all the senses.

Education is what ties the two above disciplines together. Psychology and art alone are very different but with having the proper process in both, together they form a creative solution for those not only in need of therapy, but for all.

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## Figure Captions

*Figure 1:* Untitled (Lees, 2003 – 2005)

*Figure 2:* Letting Go (Lees, 2003 – 2005)

*Figure 3:* Inner Child (Lees, 2003 – 005)

*Figure 4:* Haling Hope (Lees, 2003 – 2005)

## Appendix A:

### Glossary (Preston, 2008)

apperceptive – able to relate new percepts to past experience

art – “ the means of widening the range of human experiences and creating equivalents for such experiences; an area where experience can be chosen, varied and repeated at will. In the creative act, conflict is re-experienced, resolved and integrated “ (Kramer, 1958, p. 6)

art therapy – therapy with the use of creative activities to express emotions enabling individuals to manage/overcome physical and mental problems.

curative – something that cures; a remedy.

dexterity – skill and grace in physical movement, especially in the use of the hands or mental skill or cleverness.

didactic – intended to instruct; inclined to teach or moralize excessively.

craypas – painting media such as watercolor, temper, acrylic, oils, wax  
crayons