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CHILDREN AND THEIR ART

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Evaluating Using Art Therapy Art Development  
Stages of Art

ABSTRACT (100-200 WORDS): Art is an important facet of children's development and can aid disturbed children in the form of therapy, if needed. It is necessary to consider the development of art in normal young children before the topic of art therapy can be broached. The importance of art and the different stages of art that children go through are touched upon in the following pages to provide necessary background information. The last section of this paper discusses the role of art therapy by defining art therapy and looking at how evaluations based on art should be made.

The purpose of this paper was to answer a personal curiosity and expand on a topic believed to be of great importance to early childhood educators. The information provided satisfies the author's curiosity but strictly provides material that relates to her specific questions only. Research was gained through various publications and then consolidated.

Art is, indeed, a revealing medium of self-expression for children. The magnitude of feeling that can be expressed requires handling by professionals; however, having a basic knowledge of this topic can be of great assistance to early childhood educators.

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## OUTLINE

THESIS: Art is an important facet of a child's development and can aid disturbed children in the form of therapy if needed.

### I. Role of Art and Development

- A. Importance of art in normal young children
  - 1. Allows for creativity and self-expression
  - 2. Creates internal order
- B. Stages of Art
  - 1. Ages 1 1/2-5
  - 2. Ages 5-8
  - 3. Ages 8-12

### II. Role of Art Therapy

- A. Definition of Art Therapy
  - 1. Concepts that are addressed
  - 2. Four principles of art therapy
  - 3. Types of drawings used in art therapy
- B. Evaluations Based on Art Therapy
  - 1. Evaluation criteria
  - 2. Requirements needed to make evaluations

Every early childhood classroom across the country and across the world incorporates art projects into their curriculum. Generally, these activities are "extras"--something to do for fun after the "real work" is finished. However, art activities are real work and a great deal of learning results from use with art materials. Art experiences can also aid children who are striving to cope with traumas in their lives. An examination of art, the importance of art, the relationship between art and violence, and the benefits art can reap through art therapy are presented in the following pages.

Art and creativity are two terms that are often used interchangeably. It is assumed that neither can exist without the other. Another common myth is that not everyone is creative. Webster defines art as a "conscious arrangement or production of sounds, colors, forms, movements, or other elements in a way that affects the aesthetic sense." A looser definition is given by Sally Atack. She states art as being "any and all activities that involve the making of marks with, or in, almost any kind of material" (Atack, 1982, p.3). Art experiences can be chosen, varied, and repeated at will. They employ symbols and conventions in such a way as to bring out real feeling (Kramer, 1958). According to these definitions, creativity is not fundamental to art. Creativity itself is the ability to see new relationships between previously unrelated objects or ideas. It

is an aesthetic organization that involves original thought or action (Hildebrand, 1981). Most children never consider the possibility that they do not have the ability to create an art project. This attitude is fundamental in art therapy.

Although children cannot be taught creativity, they can and do learn on their own and develop their own methods of expression (Lay-Dopyera, 1982). When creating art, young children are not just interested in the end product but learn at every step as they go through the creative process. These stepping stones build on each other and are just as, if not more, important as the final product (Atack). Consequently, when an adult focuses on the child's final product, the child loses satisfaction with his project (Lay-Dopyera) and begins to question the creativity which he previously believed in.

The importance of art can be seen in a multitude of areas. For young children, expression through art comes naturally and spontaneously. It is an indication of their thoughts and emotions (McLeavey, 1979). Even though art cannot remove the cause of tension or directly resolve the conflict that children are experiencing, it does allow for the expression of new attitudes and feelings in a safe environment. Children are also able to experiment with their ideas and feelings freely (Kramer, 1971) without fear of punishment or ridicule.

Art activities invite children to create a world that is completely centered around themselves. This leads to a strengthening of the children's senses of identity. They begin

to feel and know who they are, what they can do, and where they belong (Kramer, 1971). They also become familiar with their likes and dislikes as well as learn to understand and accept themselves. Through art, children widen their range of human experiences and make equivalents for their experiences. The fact that there is always an emotional charge to artwork (Kramer, 1958) makes art experiences themselves emotional. These experiences can be reality or fantasy and serve as tools of expression or catharsis.

A wide variety of things are learned through using art media. Children realize that they can create images and that these images function as symbols that can be manipulated. When making paintings, drawings, or sculptures, children receive visual feedback on their own ideas. They must rely on their own sensibilities and perceptions about imagery and learn differentiation processes (Lay-Dopyera). Motor control is gained as children handle the mediums and temper and impulse control are acquired because children must concentrate and be patient with the task at hand (Kramer, 1958). Art activities also require organized thoughts and cooperation with others is often demanded. A final important aspect of art is that intrinsic motivation is involved (Atack). Children are free to perform because they want to and for any reason that they want to. All of these facets are necessary and beneficial throughout life and they all result from art work.

Six stages in art activities have been identified. The

first is discovery and exploration. In this stage, materials are used for fun and activities are related to physical and motor skills and sensations. It is a time for self-expression, experimenting, and exploring. Stage two is discovering the same mark again. Order makes its first appearance and shapes tend to be repeated. The children have more control over their physical movements and an increased awareness of differences between things is present. Stage three involves making the same mark again. Shapes and marks are repeated deliberately from memory or are copied. Making something stand for something else is the fourth stage. Images can gradually be recognized and links between names and objects become more obvious. Stage five is remembering the past. Children are able to connect images and real things, however, many distortions are still present. Finally, stage six is seeing, knowing, and making. Children at this stage can make fairly recognizable pictures or models. As a result of their greater awareness, children can "tell" more of what they see. Children's thinking processes are more evident in their artwork (Atack).

Within the six stages of art activities are five ways of using art materials. First are precursory activities. These include scribbling and smearing. This exploration of physical properties does not lead to creation but is a positive experience in itself. Second is chaotic discharge. Spilling, splashing, and pounding are examples of the destructive behavior that leads to a loss of control. Third is art in the service of defense.



This is described as stereotyped repetition, copying, tracing, and banal conventional production. The fourth way of using art materials is by making pictographs. These are pictorial communications which replace or supplement words. They are usually executed crudely and seldom attain the integration and evocative power of art. Finally, comes formed expression. This is art in the full sense of the word. Symbolic configurations are produced that are successful at communication and self-expression (Kramer, 1971).

Some common symbols have been recognized in children's drawings. Mandalas (crossed circles), suns, radials, and human figures are the most prevalent of these. They seem to satisfy an innate preference that children have for symmetry, balance, and design (Lay-Dopyera). These common symbols appear at certain ages within the developmental stages of art that Lowenfeld has defined. The scribbling stage appears first and generally includes children between two and four years of age. Scribbles are initially longitudinal and then become circular. They are random and uncontrolled at first but then children mix the motions (Hildebrand). Scribbling is a natural step in development and appears to serve as a foundation for behavior in a number of other areas as well (Lay-Dopyera). By age three, children can skillfully hold a pencil and have enough control to draw shapes (McLeavey). At three-and-one-half years of age, children typically begin naming their drawings. This leads to an increase in recording their experiences through drawings (Lay-

Dopyera). When the mandala makes its appearance between three and four years of age, children are in a transitional stage that leads to drawing people and suns (McLeavey).

The preschematic stage encompasses the ages of four through seven. The first representative symbols are present here, usually in the form of a head. Circles and rectangles are first drawn and spaces are very carefully filled in (Hildebrand). By the age of four, children can draw a three-part man using any combination of head, eyes, legs, and mouth. At this stage, the largest part of children's drawings is of what is most important to them. Within a year, children can draw a six-part man made up of head, eyes, nose, mouth, body, and legs. Preschematic drawings lack any kind of spatial relationship and color is used for emotional appeal, not realism (McLeavey).

Once children reach the schematic stage (ages seven to nine), their attention is focused on drawing a human figure (Hildebrand). Six-year-olds draw seven- to nine- part figures and have the dexterity to hold pencils similar to adults. The increase in logical thinking, refined motor control, and improved perceptual skills allow children to use a baseline at this stage (McLeavey); however, they are not yet able to pursue depth (Hildebrand). As children age, their abilities increase and their drawings show more order. A seven-year-old can draw a nine- to eleven- part man and an eight-year-old a ten-to eleven- part man. Children in this age range may also omit parts that they feel are not important. Likewise, the parts that they

consider significant are over-emphasized (McLeavey).

Other notable developments occur within Lowenfeld's stages. Between ages one-and-one-half and three, the kinesthetic self is visible. At this level, children apply their learned behavior patterns to create an effect. Their attention span is only three to four minutes long and they show immediate reactions to the random drawings they make. Many times, these young children are still more interested in the taste of the crayon than its function (Fugaro, 1978).

The gestalt of a circle occurs between ages three and four. It comes into existence after generalized circular motions are practiced. Children do not relate their verbalizations to their drawings and have difficulty with sequences and logic because they are still in preconceptual thought. Then, at four to five years of age, the "tadpole man" makes an appearance. The human body is an undifferentiated head and body that includes joined appendages (Fugaro).

At the age of five to six years, the human figure becomes more naturalistic. Torso and limbs can be distinguished and sex characteristics are drawn using hair and dress. Children break from just drawing themselves and their families and begin to include school friends and other people (Fugaro). Objects are often drawn on top of or next to each other with no concern for the environment. Drawings are put together piece by piece but children can explain them (Fugaro).

A transition to profile and baseline occurs between the ages

of six and seven. Children expand their environment, largely due to school attendance, and have more naturalistic drawings as they enter concrete operational thought. Details become increasingly important and there is a definite distinction between the sky and the ground. The next step, "X-ray" drawings, are apparent in seven- to eight-year-olds' pictures. In these drawings, the inside and the outside of an object are seen simultaneously (Fugaro) .

Throughout history, art has been used to "make sense of crises, pain, and psychic upheaval" (Malchiodi, 1990, p.4). Art expression helps individuals to express their trauma and crises through imagery. It is a way of nonverbally communicating thoughts and feelings in a non-threatening way. There are no restrictions placed on art and so the artist can make the drawing into anything he desires (Malchiodi). Using creativity and images helps to relieve stress, neutralize violence, and create order out of chaos. Art expression does not focus on one aspect of violence; rather, it deals with an entire grouping of feelings and experiences (Kramer, 1979).

Unfortunately, many young children today experience violence within their own families. Violence within the family is loosely defined as "any interaction that involves a use of physical force against another family member" (Malchiodi, p.2). Physical and sexual abuse, neglect, and witness to violence against other family members are all included in this definition. Children are often victims because they can be controlled. Art expression is

a way that children can make their abuse or witness to violence tangible. In addition, some children will use art expression and play to directly control the crises they are experiencing. One defense mechanism that is used frequently is projection. Children are not able to acknowledge their own thoughts and feelings so they project them onto someone or something else (Malchiodi) .

In order to help children deal with familial violence, a method needed to be devised that would, as Erikson stated, "allow children to act out their problems without interruption by family members" (Erikson, 1985, p.222). Art therapy does just that. In such a situation, children are encouraged to draw a picture of any kind in the presence of a non-threatening adult. In this way, children are given temporary control over the events in their lives. The use of art therapy implies that the creative process can be a means of reconciling emotional conflicts, of fostering self-awareness, and of generating personal growth (American Art Therapy Association [AATA], 1992). Edith Kramer defines art therapy as a method that "engages the creative process ...towards the goals of overall personality growth and rehabilitation." ' She emphasizes that it needs to be used in conjunction with other approaches (i.e. psychotherapy, remedial reading, relationship with a social worker, etc.) in order to be truly effective (Kramer, 1958, p.III & X).

Art intervention can be designed to address four major concepts. The first is learning to communicate feelings.

Children who have been exposed to violence in their homes have learned to hold their feelings in and to conceal the violence itself. Art expression is a safe way to express and channel aggressive feelings without hurting themselves or others. Secondly, children are given permission to be children. Many children are forced to take on parental roles in the home before they are of adult age. Art therapy allows children to play, experiment, make-believe, and regress. Thirdly, coping with stress can be addressed. Children can place internal stress on paper by using imagery. This provides for a symbolic control of the elements of trauma and violence in their lives. The final concept deals with addressing the self-image. Many children need art therapy to develop a positive self and encourage them to be individuals (Malchiodi). Although art therapy cannot treat aggressive behavior, it can be tolerated if others are not disturbed (Kramer, 1958). Additionally, handicapped children can achieve a great deal with the help of art therapy. Most handicapped children have limited forms of expression but art is one form that they can consistently rely on (White; see appendix p.18,19).

One very important factor of art therapy is found within children. They have a natural exuberance about art and, when this is encouraged, it leads to successful interventions (White, see appendix, p.18). Four principles of art therapy should be followed to receive the best results. The first concerns selecting paper size. Small, durable paper should be used. This

allows the artwork to be displayed and children are not overwhelmed by the area they must cover. Eleven by fourteen inch paper that is stiff enough to stand up for display is recommended. The second concern is the choice of coloring materials. Even though crayons are inexpensive and readily available, they break easily and do not provide swift, sharp, smooth color. Finger and poster paints are acceptable if the drawings can be finished at one sitting but they do require supervision and cleanup. The best materials are colored felt pens with broad tips and non-permanent ink. The third principle to follow is subject. Children should express themselves with art, not feel obligated to draw a thing. Drawing a dream or memory {abstract idea} is acceptable as is the expression of concepts such as happy, work, play, and home. Lastly, is a principle for teachers to follow. As a rule, teachers should never do or say anything to censure artwork. Posing questions encourages children to verbalize their thoughts or clarify their ideas. Self-expression should always be endorsed and encouraged (White, see appendix, p.19).

Art therapy is successful because children seldom refuse to draw a picture when requested to do so. Rather, it is seen as an enjoyable, non-threatening activity (McLeavey). Therefore, to further increase the success rate, children should be asked to draw a non-threatening picture. After all, the purpose of art therapy is to help children cope, not cause more stress. But what is considered non-threatening? What should therapists ask

children to draw? Generally, children are not intimidated when asked to draw a house, a tree, or a person. These items serve as useful tools in a projective nature as well. However, drawing people can bring up positive and negative issues in a child's life so caution must be exercised. Person drawing can also bring out some very powerful feelings if some form of abuse has recently occurred. In the same way, family drawings often open up topics that children are possibly not yet ready to discuss. If asked to draw a family picture before they are ready, children may have a hard time developing the crucial element of trust. Therefore, family drawings should not be requested initially (Malchiodi).

Another type of drawing that can be very beneficial is a spontaneous drawing. These drawings allow children to be in control and draw whatever they wish. Very personal issues are often revealed through spontaneous drawings (Malchiodi). Insight can also be gained in an AFKD ("a favorite kind of drawing"). These are also non-threatening and are based on the hypothesis that "disproportionate and/or excessive inclement weather is related to physical abuse" (Malchiodi, p.65).

When evaluating children's art, it is necessary to separate elements that are characteristic of mental age and those that express individual traits (Kramer, 1958). Care must also be taken to avoid drawing conclusions from incomplete and inadequate samplings (Hildebrand). However, a great deal can be learned about children's feelings by observing their art within these



guidelines. A free-flowing variation indicates healthy feelings about self and others whereas a rigid repetition indicates emotional problems (Lay-Dopyera). Emotional growth, in general, can be understood by the amount of repetition or exaggeration children use. Children's physical growth is shown in their skill with tools and their active participation. Intellectual and perceptual growth can be observed and assessed in regard to children's use of detail. Finally, the number of themes children produce and how they relate to their actual experiences implies their creative and social growth (Hildebrand).

Children with specific emotional problems produce certain characteristics within their drawings. Insecure children will generally draw people with tiny feet and too-weI I-behaved children tend to draw figures with short arms (McLeavey). Similarly, an indicator of physical abuse is when seven-year-olds draw disproportionately large heads (Malchiodi) and indicators of sexual abuse are shown by a lack of the lower body (Malchiodi).

Of course, it is important to remember that children's art should never be interpreted except by qualified professionals. Registered art therapists have completed formal training and possess a thorough understanding of therapy and art modalities and how they correspond in assessment and treatment (Malchiodi). According to the AATA, art therapists must have a minimum of a two-year Master's Degree or the equivalent which includes a minimum of six hundred hours of a supervised practicum experience (AATA). Art therapists work in a variety of settings and often

require specialty training for their positions. An example of such a situation is when a therapist begins work in a shelter and is dealing with abuse cases. A therapist working under these conditions would require training in intake and interviewing for possible abuse. An understanding of child development, family systems, and domestic violence is also a necessity (Malchiodi).

Aside from the official training and talents required of an art therapist, several other tasks are demanded by this occupation. As a result of their interaction with the social services and other professionals, the legal systems, and child protection services, art therapists must have an understanding of these groups (Malchiodi). Reporting skills, charting, recording, and participation in staff meetings are also requirements. Art therapists may also provide evaluations, development of patient treatment plans, goals and objectives, case management services, and therapeutic treatment (AATA). The art therapist behaves as an artist, teacher, and therapist simultaneously (Kramer, 1958).

Art therapists are given the goal of allowing disturbed people the "pleasures and satisfaction which creative work can give" and then to make those experiences "meaningful and valuable to the total personality" (Kramer, 1958, p.5). Instead of interpreting the unconscious as psychotherapists do, art therapists examine children's productions and behavior to gain an understanding of the total personality. There is a fine line that art therapists must follow. They need to aid children's creative processes without disturbing them by providing too much

influence or too deep of a level (Kramer, 1958). They must understand the relationship between the formal qualities of the products they encounter as well as the psychological processes which were active when they were made. Art therapists serve as the children's allies and as participants in creative adventures. They provide technical and emotional support that makes the process easier for the children (Kramer, 1971).

Art holds the psychology, anthropology, and history of people. Cave drawings show that, even in the earliest of times, people saw meaning and reason in art (Fugaro, p.3). Children too, see meaning and reason in art and communicate these ideas with their drawings. When children have experienced or witnessed some sort of violence, art is a non-threatening form of communication for them. Thus, children are able to understand and communicate their deepest feelings through art experiences. Art therapists function as interpreters of this communication form. With their training and knowledge, they help children to recognize and deal with the traumas in their young lives.

In summary, all children benefit from art experiences. Benefits can range from simple exploration of art materials to deep emotional expression and each of these serves a very important function in children's lives.

Teachers play an influential role in children's art development. Observation of children as they draw and the encouragement of children's natural creativity and desire to draw are ways to enhance the benefits that children may reap from art.

Art is, indeed, a meaningful and emotional activity for

young children. Adult support and encouragement of children's drawings provides an emotional outlet for children's expressions and problems until such emotions are mastered and problems are abolished.

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# in the CLASSROOM

If big is bad, so is too small. In this case, the child has to squeeze his work in, or it simply runs off the edge. It's not easy to take the art table home to mother, so half the work is left to the mercy of the cleanup squad.

While there is no fixed rule on paper size for the early education classroom, the size that is most nearly right is 11x14 inches. But the best guiding principle is to order the paper to suit the child, and not the child to suit the paper. (Some kids, after all, like to work big; others, to work small.) In any case, the paper should be still enough to stand up against a wall or window for display.

**Materials Matter.** The next consideration is the choice of coloring materials.

Crayons are cheap and abundant. But they break easily, and they don't deliver swill, sharp, smooth color.

Finger and poster paints do, but they involve considerable supervision and cleanup. All of which is fine, if a child's attention span permits completion of a picture in one session; not so fine, when a picture can't be finished in one sitting.

While each teacher must make her own decisions in terms of available materials and budget, a set of colored felt pens, with broad tips and non-permanent ink, offers her children the satisfaction of quick, bright, solid colors. And there's no cleanup. If a youngster doesn't finish his painting in one period, he can

add to it from day to day with no loss or muss. Also, felt pens are a happy compromise between large and line lines and, since they are still, they represent a natural progression from preschool stick-drawings in dirt.

**Drawing a Dream.** The third and perhaps most important consideration is subject. Demanding that a child, whether exceptional or not, draw a box, a car or any other *thing* is as artistically self-defeating as handing him a stencil to fill in. The whole purpose of art in the classroom is to encourage a child to *express himself*, not to re-create some fixed thing.

The most fruitful and fascinating avenues lie in asking a child to create an abstract-drawing a dream or a memory, for example. There is little moment to a felt-pen rendition of, say, a house-but, oh, what significance there is in a child's effort to portray what the word *home* means to him. In the same way, a sketch of a Christmas tree is meaningless, compared to a child's own artistic impression of the meaning or aura of Christmas.

The purpose of the classroom art lesson should be to encourage the expression of concepts—*happiness ... work ... play ... surprise—the* host of abstracts that our thinking actually is based on. As these thoughts evolve in visuals, all other thinking processes are enhanced. What does music mean? Birthday? Night? Day? We know the words, of course. And so do the children. But *Life* gives them a chance to express their personal connotations of them ... and leads the way to expressing their points of view verbally.

**Censure Factor.** The fourth and final consideration in classroom art therapy: never, ever should a teacher do anything, or say anything, that implies censure of a child's work.

Teacher can and should ask questions—questions that help a child clarify his artistic conceptualization of an idea ... that inspire him to verbalize about his creation and his thoughts. She might, for example, ask what a particular color or image means to its maker.

Approval of a child's artwork is not a value-judgment, but simply endorsement and encouragement of his effort to express himself. Censure has no part at all in the process, since it's basically and intrinsically the child's.

By using this approach to art, the class situation can be made exciting and constructive. And, as each little creator attempts to explain what he means with his art, he's bound to discover that he, himself, is the meaning, both individual and unique.