

Original Paper

Research on the Application of Art Therapy into College Art Teaching in the Context of COVID-19 Prevention and Control

Chen Yueqin^{1*}

¹ Binzhou College, Shandong, China

Received: April 11, 2020

Accepted: April 20, 2020

Online Published: April 30, 2020

doi:10.22158/jecs.v4n2p97

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jecs.v4n2p97>

Abstract

Art therapy employ art symbols to externalize an individual's psychology, emotion, personality and subconsciousness. Thus, it is widely applied in psychological consultation and treatment as well as clinical treatment of physical and mental diseases, whereas the study of integrating art therapy into art teaching among colleges and universities is rarely seen. To this end, this study, aimed at the psychological behavior and problems of college students who are prone to worry, dysphoria, fear, melancholy and irritability after the outbreak of COVID-19 in spring 2020, carries out the application research of integrating art therapy into college art teaching, in attempt to alleviate their psychological distress caused by the epidemic and assist them to establish a psychological defense mechanism for addressing future similar catastrophic events while inculcating art knowledge, and further develop the art teaching mode of "art therapy integrated into art teaching".

Keywords

art therapy, integration, college art teaching

1. The Concept of Art Therapy and Its Integration History with Art Teaching

1.1 The Concept of Art Therapy

Art therapy refers to a kind of psychotherapy with various art activities as the medium. It is to stabilize and adjust the emotion and mood through art creation in which the participant carries out free association, the imagination and other psychological activities, in the pursuit of esthetic process to heal the individual mental illness or correct abnormal psychological behaviors and problems. Its basic principle is that people can release the internal repression of emotion, feelings, conflict and subconsciousness through art creation, from which to obtain a sense of satisfaction and achievement, so that ease and enhance individual emotions and mentality, alleviate psychological pressure and smooth inner trauma, as a common approach in psychological counseling and therapy, as well as clinical

physical and mental illness treatment.

1.2 The Integration History of Art Therapy and Art Teaching

Art therapy is expressed in non-textual language, thus refrains from avoidance consciousness, defense or resistance behavior, since this way can help better understand the subconscious mind, thoughts and emotions of participants, it is widely applied by psychological counselors and medical personnel, and developed rapidly. Through literature review, it is found that many scholars and art educators have carried out related research in the integration of art therapy and art teaching.

The initial “art therapy concept” was introduced by American psychoanalyst-Margaret Naumberg, who founded the Walden Children’s Art School, where she introduced art for the first time into children’s psychological counseling and treatment, and proposed an “art therapy model for analyzing the dynamic orientation “. She advocated to allow patients release subconsciousness through spontaneous art creation activities, and to find, understand, and heal themselves in art works. She formally put forward the concept of “art therapy”, which makes it become an independent subject and specialty, and develops into a profession, which is an epoch-making development of art therapy. American David Henry first proposed the concept of “art education integrated into art therapy “, he came up with the application of art therapy to carry out art teaching. It specifically refers to the psychological treatment concept and methods applied to art teaching activities, so as to achieve a positive impact on the physical and mental development of students. Its research purpose is not to provide professional psychological counseling services for students as a sample of psychoanalysis, but to treat students as normal individuals, through the development of art teaching activities in classroom to conduct in-depth observation and understanding of students, with focus on the psychological behavior and problems reflected by students, timely provide them with a supportive and effective response to help with their psychological reconstruction and growth. During the 1950s, in his book *Creation and Mental Growth*, American Viktor Lowenfeld discussed the relationship between children’s painting and their intellectual development, and proposed the theory about the development stage of children’s painting, which for the first time clearly distinguished children’s painting in different periods according to the age stage of children. It laid a practical foundation for the interpretation of the psychological meaning of children’s painting on the basis of children’s art treatment, and also a theoretical foundation for the application of children’s art treatment in art education practice, and created a new model of “art education treatment”, thus providing a theoretical basis for ordinary educators to carry out art education with art treatment orientation. In the early 1960s, under the influence of humanism thought such as Maslow and Rogers, art therapy began to develop in various forms. “Rogers believes that people are inherently trustworthy because they have the potential to solve inner problems on their own, so if the healer is truly engaged in the art process, one can grow in the targeted direction.” Since then, art therapy has transformed from psychological therapy mainly aimed at special children to one of the methods for ordinary children and ordinary people to pursue self-growth and self-realization, which is a turning point for the further widening of the application scope in art therapy.

At present, the research on the integration of art therapy and art teaching in China is sufficiently in-depth, which is mainly carried out in the campus mental health counseling and psychological education teaching, but the combination of art education in colleges and universities is not commonly seen. Professor Qian Chuxi of East China Normal University has implemented a research project on the investigation and application of art education to promote the mental health of teenagers. The study found that “art education based on art therapy can help junior high school students alleviate their psychological problems and make them develop healthily.” Zhu Hengchu of the Academy of Fine Arts in Nanjing Normal College of Special Education discussed in “Picture Book Therapy - A New Model of Art Therapy Based on Image Language” the possibility of picture book therapy in the aspects of experimental expression of symbolic images, aesthetic construction in picture book reading, knowledge internalization, individual memory and artistic emotion creation practice, and studied the new path of picture book therapy in combination with art practice teaching.

2. Significance of Art Therapy in College Art Teaching

Art therapy is a branch of psychotherapy with various art activities as the medium. It allows patients to produce free association through art creation to stabilize and regulate emotion, so that achieve treatment of mental illness or correction of behavioral problems in the process of pursuing aesthetics. Its main principle is to express the depressed feelings, conflicts and hidden subconsciousness of the individual through the way of art creation, thus obtain the sense of satisfaction and achievement from it, so as to relieve the individual mood and mentality, release the individual psychological pressure, and smooth the inner trauma. In view of this, this study integrates art therapy integrated in art teaching in colleges and universities to provide the above-mentioned assistance for students under the background of COVID-19 prevention and control. Contemporary college students grow up in rapid social progress, while family structure and environment also undergo various abnormal changes, parents pay less attention to their somatopsychic development and mental health, hence, college students tend to more or less appear certain psychological problems. The main manifestations are psychological conflict, anxiety, depression, inferiority complex, social disorder, bigotry and other mental health disorders. These problems, if not properly regulated and dredged, will accumulate with time, resulting in serious psychological problems, and a series of potential psychological issues after college students enter the society that may cause a large number of social problems. Especially in the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak makes bunches of college students to be slightly perplexed, resulting in anxiety, terror, impulse and other psychological behavior tendencies and problems. In this context, art educators are obliged to notice their mental health while teaching art knowledge, enable them to learn the fine arts knowledge while alleviate psychological distress caused by the epidemic through stage art therapy, help them to construct the psychological defense mechanism to face up with similar catastrophic events again, then step into the society healthily and face the future positively,, which is also the responsibility of art educators in colleges and universities.

3. Specific Approaches of Art Therapy in College Art Teaching

Combining art therapy with art teaching in colleges and universities is not to take students as a sample of psychological treatment, but to apply the idea and method of psychotherapy to art teaching. Carrying out hierarchical and stepwise activities is an approach to observe and understand the concerns and worry of students in suddenly confronting of large-scale catastrophic events, provide them with timely and effective supportive responses, and finally help them fully express their subconscious feelings and ideas through relevant art forms. Students may have a catharsis and expression of abnormal behaviors and problems generated during the outbreak of COVID-19, alleviate psychological and physical distress by participating in art teaching activities, construct healthy personality and positive values, and promote sound development of mind-body health. This outcome cannot be achieved through traditional art classroom and psychological course in the positive effect of interdisciplinary teaching activities. The research is carried out mainly through the following three ways:

3.1 Build Questionnaires and Interviews as Basis, form Pre-analysis of Art Therapy in College Art Teaching

In the spring of 2020, a new type of epidemic broke the rhythm of our lives. Many students appear psychological behaviors and problems such as anxiety, dysphoria, fear and irritability during this period. These were “heart diseases” under the epidemic situation. Thus they need proper psychological regulation and guidance to help them deal with the epidemic scientifically, reduce the psychological disturbance and psychological injury caused by the epidemic, and improve physical and mental health. On this basis, in order to understand the basic situation of students’ learning, life and psychological state changes after the outbreak of COVID-19, the research and teaching team conducted online distribution of questionnaires, carried out video interviews to the students with special circumstances according to the feedback, and made detailed interview records. Subsequently, combining questionnaire and interview records of the information, made in-depth analysis and sorted out the collected questionnaire and interviews of college students after the occurrence of COVID-19 of the basic psychological changes in categories, established an initial portfolio in terms of these changes. The initial portfolio mainly filed from the students’ personal information, family living environment, individual mental health and so forth, so as to provide as detailed and accurate first-hand information as possible for the follow-up study and ensure the smooth development of the study.

3.2 Orient Psychotherapy as Guidance, Integrate Art Therapy into College Art Teaching System

Considering the effect of art therapy derives from the professional intervention and guidance of psychotherapists, the research team is composed of senior psychological counselors and professional art teachers in colleges and universities. Before research activities, psychological experts are invited to carry out targeted professional training to ensure the professionalism and effectiveness of the team members to implement this research. Then, based on the pre-categorization of psychological problems, the research team analyzed in depth the basic situation and information of each psychological category of the students under test and the specific psychological problems reflected in the information from the

psychological point of view. The factors of each kind of psychological problems were analyzed, and the classes are divided according to the types of similar psychological and behavioral problems and individual needs. Then different art teaching activities and contents were designed according to the situation of class division, and a whole set of art therapy was constructed into the system of art teaching. The curriculum system devised by the team includes four aspects: art techniques, emotional experience, subjective well-being, and positive personality charm. In addition, the curriculum system also establishes a mental health teaching model with art classroom teaching activities as the main line with experience and sharing as the core, so that students can gain more positive experience, emotion, perception and promotion, and improve sound psychological quality and ability as a whole. The teaching content is a combination of non-structural and structural painting, specifically emotional expression, free painting, portrait expression, group expression of the four theme sections of the activity content, each theme is divided into specific painting content, each time complete one teaching task, to ensure the hierarchy and pertinence of problem solving.

3.3 Apply Art Classroom as Platform, Develop the Practice of "Art Therapy in College Art Teaching"

According to the constructed whole set of art therapy integrated in art teaching system, the stepwise "discovery-intervention-treatment" process is carried out in art teaching activities. The first stage is to introduce students understand the basic knowledge and skills of some fine arts, without requirements and standards for the mastery of these fine arts knowledge and techniques, which is only used to improve students fine arts works. The second stage requires students to create art in theme, while teachers do not make any evaluation of the art works created by students, but only describe the image and content shown in the works. In the third stage, students explain their own works of art and their creative intentions to enrich our understanding of the work, certainly, teachers should stand in the psychological perspective of students to grasp the psychological problems and concerns expressed by students, guide them to expose their subconsciousness through understanding their ideas and feelings, and then find the appropriate solution for intervention and treatment. At the same time, other students should be encouraged by positive evaluation, and sufficient support. The key point is to identify the problems they present through the classroom discussion, so as to help and promote themselves to find the causes, seek for solutions to the problems, and foster them to form the correct psychological healing model of the narration self-discovery solution seeking self-healing.

3.4 Take Art Therapy as a Medium, Help Students Establish a Psychological Defense Mechanism

After carrying out a series of practical activities of "art therapy integrated in art teaching", whether the students' psychological behavior and problems have been improved and alleviated needs further prove in test. Therefore, with the mastery of the students' basic psychological situation in the previous stages from their art works as the foundation, they were asked to create the same theme works once again for the comparison of the early and late works, thus evaluate the emotional and ideological changes presented in the students' early and late works through professional art therapy evaluation, and demonstrate the effectiveness and feasibility of "art therapy integrated in art teaching". As shown in the

evaluation results, since the introduction of integrated art teaching activities, the psychological behavior and problems of participating students, such as anxiety, dysphoria, fear, melancholy and irritability, have obviously alleviated, and the students' sense of self-identity has also undergone positive changes, with self-confidence, innovation and cooperation improved significantly. It is proved that this system is feasible and effective to integrate art therapy integrated in art teaching. On this basis, in order to enable college students to deal with similar catastrophic events independently and correctly in the future, we have carried out targeted group art teaching activities, developed some relevant art associations, combined art classroom activities with extracurricular activities, and further developed the teaching mode of "art therapy integrated in art teaching ". Through participating in various group activities, college students obtain support and strength from the group, which further helps them to establish a healthy psychological defense mechanism to deal with all kinds of difficulties and obstacles in a correct manner, master the proper mental health care and prevention means, enhance their ability to solve problems, form positive self-values and personality, thus lay a good psychological foundation for the future step into society to appropriately handle all kinds of problems in life and study.

4. Countermeasures for the Integration of Art Therapy in College Art Teaching Research

China has long attached great importance to aesthetic education in colleges and universities. In 2019, the Ministry of Education issued Opinions on Strengthening Aesthetic Education in Colleges and Universities in the New Age, which clearly stated that "universities should incorporate public art curriculum and art practice into its teaching plan, and each student must complete the school's prescribed public art curriculum to graduate, subordinate colleges and universities must submit detailed rules for the implementation of aesthetic education work on September 1, 2019". The Opinion fully emphasizes the importance of the credit completion of public art courses in university education and promotes the construction of elective courses of public art courses in colleges and universities. Under this premise, colleges and universities may enrich the content of art elective courses through various forms, so that art elective courses can present more advantages and effects.

4.1 Develop School-based Teaching Materials for Art Therapy in College Art Teaching

As an elective course of public art in colleges and universities, the objective is to pay more attention to the cultivation of students' emotion, attitude and values on the basis of imparting knowledge and ability. Therefore, students' mental health, emotion, attitude and values can be regarded as the main training goal of art elective courses in colleges and universities. Consequently, it is possible to develop school-based teaching materials for the integration of art therapy integrated in art teaching. It is worth noting that when developing school-based teaching materials, experts and teachers in the field of psychotherapy are imperative to jointly develop and build school-based teaching materials and courses. To guarantee the outcome of integrated art teaching, it is necessary to set up the teaching contents, forms and methods of the course from the perspective of psychotherapy, formulates a reasonable teaching stage and teaching plan, as well as an art therapy teaching system that suitable for the students

in different schools. In addition, the compilation of school-based textbooks can integrate the art forms such as simple strokes, comics, comic books and so on that college students like, so as to soothe their emotions, delight their mind, meanwhile, guide them to comprehend and contemplate the reality to establish a correct outlook on life and values.

4.2 Remove the Obstacles in College Students Painting, Stimulate Their Enthusiasm for Painting Creation

It is found in the study that many students are not confident in their painting skills, and worried about the effect, thus who often refuse to participate in painting creation activities on the grounds of poor capability, or low willingness, this will bring a variety of difficulties to art teaching. Therefore, teachers must explain some basic painting techniques and skills to students before the activities are carried out, so as to ensure that students can create smoothly through these simple painting methods. Besides, teachers may introduce the evaluation criteria of the course before carrying out teaching activities, so that students can understand that the principle of the course is to pay attention to inner expression rather than painting skills, with special emphasis on originality and emotional experience in the work, to eliminate their concerns about the consideration of painting skills and avoid painting obstacles that affect the further development of art teaching activities.

Another point is to stimulate student's creative enthusiasm, which is directly related to the effect of art therapy. As for the way to ignite students' creative enthusiasm, teachers can choose the life or event close to college students in the design of teaching content, providing them drawing sources with practical feelings, and establish a cognitive link between art knowledge and their personal life experience. Furthermore, after the creation, teachers should encourage students to share their creative ideas, through their own explanation, students evaluation, so that they can better know and reflect on themselves. In fact, art creation is a tool for communication between teachers and students or students and students. The purpose of arousing students' creative enthusiasm is to make students fully carry out inner expression, emotional expression and independent presentation of spirit, so that teachers can understand their ideas to solve the subconscious psychological behavior and problems.

4.3 Utilize the Resources of Art Courses Outside School to Deepen the Teaching Effect

College stage is quite special that students are different from primary and middle school students and adults, whose life is relatively independent but still in the stage of attempt. To help them better adept to the society, it is necessary to have close contact with the reality, trying to deal with some life and learning problems associated with the society, and laying some psychological foundation for such problems. To this end, schools can try to cooperate with local social resources to deepen the effect of integrated art teaching. For example: cooperate with the local art gallery, art museum to hold the art therapy works exhibition of college students, so that enhance students' self-confidence, further deepen and consolidate the effect of art teaching. Students can also be encouraged to cooperate with off-campus art factories to carry out rich activities, such as these off-campus art curriculum resources can let students to resolve negative emotions, absorb the nutrients of art, constantly enhance

psychology in a relaxed state. In the meantime, the acquisition of the ability to deal with practical problems in real life can also deepen the public's recognition of art therapy, making it possible to further promote the research results of integrating art therapy integrated in art teaching, and apply it among the public to benefit more people.

As a matter of fact, in the process of art creation, the content and form of the works are integrated with the psychological experience of the creators. The integration of art therapy in art teaching makes teachers not only lay stress on the students' learning ability and knowledge mastery, but also helps students look at and deal with problems by connecting life and society, which is the practice of applying knowledge to practice. From this point of view, the art therapy in the art teaching is of great advantage. The future teaching of art elective courses in colleges and universities should emphasize students' aesthetic experience and inner experience, apart from the consideration of techniques and techniques, so as to better reflect the ultimate goal of aesthetic education, inspire college students to construct healthy personality, establish positive outlook on life and values, help them to cope with all kinds of complex life, social problems and unexpected situations in a proper and independent manner, thus prepare for final graduation into society.

References

- Chen, J. L. (2002). *Mental Health Education in Schools - Principles and Operations*. Beijing: Pedagogy Press.
- David, E. (2010). *Art Therapy* (Liu Qing Trans.). Beijing: China Light Industry Press.
- Lisa, B. M. (2012). *Art Psychotherapy - Art Therapy for Difficult Visitors* (Chen Kan Trans.). China Light Industry Press.
- Lu, Y. Q. (2009). *Art Therapy - Interpretation of Painting: From Fine Arts to Children's Inner World*. Chongqing: Chongqing University Press.