



Art Therapy in Educational System

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Abstract

The introduction of art therapy is common in a wide range of educational institutions and is applied in mental health centers as well as in hospitals around the world. Art therapy in the educational system aims to integrate students into the school system on an emotional, social, and educational level.

In an attempt to meet educational requirements, schools and preschools all over the world design specific programs to get closer to the student's needs; Israel's educational system serves as an example because every school has its own art therapist. Art therapists in schools provide therapy to students facing emotional, developmental, and learning difficulties, having the opportunity to observe them in their environment and interact with family and school staff, which can lead to a better understanding of their interpersonal interactions. Based on the evaluation of the student's behavior, his emotional state, problems, and needs, art therapists create goals and work plans for individuals or groups in a way that complements the existing educational plan and program. Art therapists in schools are not only there for students but for all participants in the system. They organize workshops with school staff and workshops with parents, hence becoming a link between parents and children, parents and teachers, teachers and children.

Art therapy is a new profession in Croatia. Art therapy is commonly used in psychiatric hospitals and centers for people with special needs. These workshops are usually led by art teachers or artists with or without additional education in mental health.

It's not expected that art therapy will enter the school system in Croatia anytime soon, but there is a possibility that already conducted international research on the effectiveness of art therapy in schools (Kaspy, 2021, Regev, 2021, Luzzatto, 2021, Bowen-Salter, 2021,...) will influence its consideration. Art therapy breaks the stigma of mental health care, and the individual is encouraged to take care of himself and others. It acts preventively, which can result in healthier and more socially acceptable behavior, increased self-esteem, and a more positive attitude about oneself, school, and learning. Therefore, it would be interesting to study the idea of its inclusion in the educational system.

Keywords: *art therapy in schools, school system, mental health awareness, psycho-education, educational system, psycho-pedagogy, systemic approach, parents, teachers and students*

1. Introduction

“Art makes the invisible visible.”

Paul Klee

Children express themselves through play, movement, and artistic expression before developing speech and learning to walk or write. From birth, a child experiences the world through sensations and emotions. The experiences he acquires, as well as the traumas he goes through in the early period of his life (before the development of speech and intellectual thinking), remain recorded in the so-called “sensory memory” (“The body keeps the score” Van der Kolk, 2014). It is difficult to get that information through words and logic. It is easier to access it through sensory experience and free, spontaneous artistic expression.

Feelings are essential when we talk about human experiences and development. Using art media in art therapy enhances the connection of internal sensations, feelings, and experiences with the external world. In this way, it is possible to communicate feelings that are sometimes difficult or impossible to express in words (Winnicott, 1971). Art therapy extends beyond “pure” artistic expression and creation and was created in the context of a therapeutic relationship that uses art to express, identify, understand, and integrate emotions to resolve internal conflicts and traumatic blockages. One of its goals is the awareness and development of personal abilities, qualities, and resources and the creation of positive mental images that can be

reached in times of difficulty (everyone has a personal treasury of solutions).

Creative artistic interventions ensure a way of working with socially and culturally diverse groups because they can overcome language barriers and rely on artistic forms (Van Westrhenen & Fritz, 2014). Art therapy is common in a wide range of educational institutions from early childhood to adolescence. It is introduced and used in mental health centers and hospitals worldwide.

2. Comparisons, Research and Working Methods

2.1. Why Introduce Art Therapy in Schools?

Children spend most of the day in pre-school institutions and schools. Hence, educators and teachers are usually the first to identify a problem or symptom of a child's emotional, developmental, cognitive, or behavioral difficulties. Every school year, teachers conclude that it is difficult or impossible to involve some students in the learning process successfully. The school is faced with a challenge not only to educate students but also to address their daily problems and needs. An apparently disinterested child may be burdened by personal and family issues, and an anxious, frightened, or depressed child may hide behind his absence or aggressiveness. Anxiety, fear, depression, perfectionism, emotional

instability, addiction, and hostility are some of the symptoms we encounter in students, and that is why it is necessary to spot, recognize, and identify the causes of their condition or behavior in time.

Introducing art therapy into the educational system aims to integrate students on an emotional, social, and educational level. Trying to meet academic demands, schools and preschools around the world are designing specific programs to get closer to the needs of students. Some schools introduce art therapy as part of the individual education program or as an additional source of help after classes.

In most countries, art therapists are making efforts to establish themselves in the educational system. In Israel, however, the situation is different. More than 3,500 art therapists are employed in schools, which means that in almost every school, there is an art therapist who is officially employed to provide emotional support to students in need.

Researcher and art therapist Dafna Moriya, in the book "Art Therapy in Schools: Effective Integration of Art Therapists in Schools" (2000), discusses the role of art therapy in Israeli schools and, more generally, the structure needed for its integration within the school system, citing challenges that she was facing and the strategies that were helpful. Together with art therapist Sharon Snir, since 2013, they have been conducting studies on the role and effectiveness of art therapy in the educational system and have made

discoveries, models, programs, experiences, and insights widely available through the book "Integrating Arts Therapies into Education." In their article "Perception of Art therapy in Adolescents clients treated within the school system", Regev and Snir received responses from the adolescents with whom they conducted research that one-hour art therapy had a very calming effect on them, especially during a stressful school day, and that the art therapy session positively impacted their feelings and experiences later that day.

The relationship between the adolescents and the art therapist was paramount. They described it as a caring relationship full of trust and respect. They saw the space of art therapy as their refuge and shelter, a place and time for themselves. They experienced the presence of art therapists in the school during the day as stimulating and supportive, which gave them an additional sense of security. They felt accepted and noticed; therefore, the whole school experience was more manageable. The students stated that releasing their feelings through art therapy and working on their fears helped them reduce stress, cope with school duties and assignments more efficiently, and learn how to control their anger and other deep emotions. They concluded that the art therapy sessions brought them a feeling of calmness, acceptance, self-confidence, and self-esteem and that they significantly improved social relationships.

The book (Regev & Snir, 2021) presents the research of a group of art therapists

(Ayalon, Belity, Frieman, Tamir Heller, Goldman, & others) who talk about systemic aspects of work in the educational system, about specific models of work in the educational system ("open studio model", "model art therapy with students with aggressive behavior"). System work implies working with parents and cooperating with teachers and art therapists. However, they also emphasize the importance of maintaining confidentiality in that system and discuss the ethics of exhibiting works created in art therapy. They believe that art therapy in school helps students solve emotional problems and adapts children with special needs and learning difficulties to the school system. Anat Ayalon states that the work of an art therapist in school has three features: (1) the art therapist enters the space where the student resides daily and thus obtains additional information about his behavior, witnesses his development, and perceives the real needs of the student, (2) the goal of the art therapist is to identify difficulties in student development and encourage proactive implementation of solutions, and (3) art therapists working in the educational system are support for three systems: the family, the educational system, and the student's personality (2021).

It is stated that parents are crucial for the success of the therapeutic process with children (Proulx, 2003); therefore, working with parents is increasingly represented in therapeutic work in schools. Unfortunately, this is not always pos-

sible due to the lack of hours for therapy or parents' awareness of the need or availability of treatment. Written parental consent is mandatory. The more clearly the Ministry of Education defines and institutionalizes the relationship between art therapists and parents, and the better it is supported by the allocation of hours and appropriate resources, the more significant the therapeutic process and changes will be and result in an increased level of cooperation between parents and educational-therapeutic staff (Belty, 2021).

Ayalon (2021) emphasizes that art therapy in the educational system should integrate aspects of individual therapy on a systemic level and states the difficulties in maintaining confidentiality inside and outside the therapeutic space. Frieman (2021) added that the art therapist must respect the student's privacy, especially in cooperation with the school staff and when transferring information to the school staff. Their comprehensive research and results are necessary for creating new theories that will serve as a model of therapeutic approach in schools.

Fuyuko Takeda in the book "Art Therapy in Schools: Research and Practice" points out that "after the Ministry of Health introduced the National Service Framework in 2004, the school expanded its role as a place for teaching and learning and provided a wide range of services, including therapy support". This act created numerous job opportunities for art

therapists in schools across Great Britain. Whether art therapy will be introduced and accepted depends largely on the cultural attitude of the country towards art in general and its role in education, as well as on the attitude towards mental health.

2.2. Difference Between Art Teachers (Art Pedagogues) and Art Therapists

Those unfamiliar with art therapy often equate art therapists with art teachers. However, there is a clear difference between an art pedagogue and an art therapist in education as well as in the occupation and role itself. The most important difference between art education and art therapy are the goals: in art education, the emphasis is on aesthetic, educational, and artistic results, while the goal in art therapy is primarily psychological.

Art professors are trained to impart knowledge through theory and apply it through the practical part.

In addition to being professionally educated in visual expression, art teachers also know art history. They can guide their students through the teaching process in all of the above-mentioned fields and help them master and improve various art techniques. Aesthetic rules and artistic norms most often determine artistic expression, while the creative process is usually guided or encouraged. The highest level of the learning process is the final product (artwork) and, as such,

is, in most cases, assessed or valued with a numerical grade of 2 (sufficient) to 5 (excellent) and is considered “successful” or “less successful.” Sometimes, you relate to the person himself, for example, “You are gifted,” “You are not very good at drawing or painting.”... Tips during the work are mainly of a technical nature. The person’s emotional experience is less important (which, of course, also depends on the sensibility of the teacher and his way of working). Due to the extensiveness of the educational plan and program, an individual approach is difficult, and the framework for selecting topics is usually predetermined, and must correspond to the plan and the program.

Art therapy stems from various fields such as medicine, psychology, education, rehabilitation, and art. It uses a specific language, and its ethics and guidelines differ in many ways from those of the school system. Art therapists come from different backgrounds, usually art pedagogues, artists, social workers, teachers, speech therapists, speech therapists, psychologists, educators, or educators trained during two- or three-year graduate and postgraduate programs for art therapists. Their education is focused on getting to know psychological processes and pathologies, methods of psychotherapy approaches, as well as researching creative processes, materials, and methods. There are separate domains of art therapy, depending on the modality that is applied: art therapy uses visual arts (painting, drawing, model-

ing, collage, mosaic, digital art...), dance therapy puts the body, movement and dance in the foreground, music therapy uses music as a medium (rhythm, sound, listening and playing), and drama therapy is a stage expression (writing-dreaming, poetry), creating stories, making dolls, role-play, acting, improvisations,...) etc.

These divisions are not strict and intertwine, everything depends on the commitment, affinity, and specialization of the art therapist.

Expressive arts therapy uses a multimodal approach (Knill, Levine, and Levine, 2005) and makes use of all forms of art by combining and using images, symbols, dreams, stories, music (sound), dance, stage-expression, poetry, and movement, moving from one sense to another. It draws its inspiration from the traditions and rituals of ancient civilizations. It emphasizes the community and the possibility of interaction with a large number of people, which makes it particularly interesting in the school system because it can be applied to entire classes.

In the art therapy process itself, it is not important to perfect the technique but to discover the characteristics of various media and their influence on the person who creates and suggests the most adequate media to the person at the given moment. The entire creation process is significant to an art therapist, from the choice of technique, color, idea, or theme, non-verbal and verbal communication, to the final work. In most cases, the process

is spontaneous and unconscious, leading to the final product, which may or may not be brought to the last production stage. Namely, the “creator” decides what to do with his work in the way that best suits him: he can leave it as it is, modify it (add something or take something away), and he can also destroy it, (the so-called “symbolic act”).

“Art can function both as a sign and as a symbol, which spoken language hardly achieves.”

Roland Barthes

Artwork is considered an intimate part of a person and should be treated as such, and the conversation about it must be full of respect and appreciation. The relationship is a “triangular” patient-therapist-work of art (Schaverien, 2000; Moon, 2010), making the dialogue indirect, which greatly facilitates access to delicate topics. There is no right or wrong “answer” or evaluation and, therefore, no comparison, expectations, criticism, or competition, which contributes to the feeling of security, acceptance, and the development of empathy.

The quality of craft and expression is not important, although the aesthetic component can contribute to developing and strengthening feelings of self-esteem and self-achievement.

The non-verbal expression also favors verbal opening: by talking about one’s work or symbols, a person reveals himself

and his experience. By repeating themes, symbols, and images, a person (in this case, a student) communicates his fears, needs, and traumatic experiences to us. The art therapist is trained to recognize these non-verbal signs and symbols and allows the student to express himself freely and metaphorically. The symbol enables the transition from the unconscious to the conscious. The art therapist instinctively recognizes the student’s limits and defense mechanisms and respects the rhythm of his creation, understanding, awareness, and crystallization.

Art therapists also apply the principles of visualization, meditation, and other regulating methods combined with artistic expression in therapeutic work.

2.3. The Role of Art Therapists in Schools

In the book “The Handbook of School Art Therapy,” 1997, Janet Bush emphasizes the importance of the various roles of art therapists and mentions the role of “Art Education Therapist,” which combines the titles of art pedagogue and art therapist. Someone with this role can teach art education but at the same time be able to identify and treat pathologies observed in the student’s work.

“One of the key roles of an art therapist is mediation in the creative process that encourages learning about oneself.”

Anat Heller

Art therapists provide therapy to students who face emotional, developmental, and learning difficulties and have the opportunity to observe them in their environment and interact with family and school staff, which can lead to a better understanding of the nature of their mutual interactions (Regev, Green - Orlovich, & Snir, 2015). Art therapists adapt to an individual or group based on assessing behavior, emotional state, possible problems, and needs in a way that complements the existing educational plan and program.

There are many different ways of acting as an art therapist in school. Art therapists in schools are there for students and all participants in the educational system. Their task is to serve school counselors and teachers by spreading knowledge about the psychological development of the child and about art as a medium of expression. The presence of an art therapist in the school facilitates the work of teachers and gives limits to their role. They organize workshops with school staff as well as workshops with parents and become a link between parents and children, parents and teachers, teachers and children. Thanks to the creative processes of art therapy, the patterns that function in the community and those that prevent interaction become conscious. Investigation through art identifies the individuals who feel rejected, neglected, or overloaded, promoting and fostering their inclusion and equal division of the roles.

In contact with students, teachers discover their personal triggers and realize that what repels, angers, or even interests them the most in students is also part of their personal stories. Exploring personal obstacles through creative play in a safe environment fosters openness, active listening, mutual interaction, and conflict resolution.

2.4. Art Therapy with Students

During individual and group art therapy workshops, children come into contact with themselves and get to know others through play and spontaneous and creative expression. They realize that their views on other people's works depend solely on their personal experiences, associations, and feelings. However, they also understand that another's reaction is a reflection of the inner world of that particular individual. This is precisely how empathy is created: by observing and accepting differences, but also by identifying them with others. In mutual conversation, children understand that they do not go through certain adversities and problems alone, and aggression and bullying are less present, contributing to a sense of security (for some children, school is the only place where they can be who they are).

Systemic expressive art therapy, suitable for working with large groups, is often used at school, the so-called "Community Expressive Arts." It focuses on the

development of the individual in the social context. Shared experience and continuous dialogue create a supportive community where the authenticity and identity of each member are a necessary part of the whole. Through such a system, it is possible to influence the collective trauma woven into society, for example, after war or disturbing national, state, or cultural events.

Huss (2016) concluded that group art therapy with victims of war or survivors of natural disasters enabled mutual exchange of traumatic experiences, but also created mutual support and a sense of connection, which resulted in a sense of joint renewal. Art creates a link to the world, brings the individual out of isolation and gives him the feeling of being seen, experienced and/or accepted.

“The community assumes the role of “witness”, it uses its senses of sight, hearing, touch and feeling to witness other people’s stories through art, poetry, music or movement.”

Melinda Meyer

By behavior that deviates from the norm, the child most often tries to convey information about how he really feels or what he is experiencing. His behavior is often a call for help that should not be ignored (e.g., conflict situations in the family, violence, abuse, difficult financial situations, feelings of inferiority, phobias, fears, etc.). Children can experience

a certain event as traumatic, even if that event may seem insignificant from an adult’s point of view. Traumatic events include defense mechanisms by which a person instinctively wants to protect himself from difficult emotions by repressing them into the unconscious. As a result of this process, new reactions and forms of behavior are formed and adopted that may be unaccepted and identified as turbulent or problematic, without taking into account the possibility that these reactions are sometimes actually the only possible response of the nervous system that has experienced some type of trauma.

Through artistic processes, we can witness emotions, blockages, and trauma in students. For example, in a child who uses large amounts of paint, spilling it beyond the edges of the picture, or water is poured from his bowl, or there are a lot of unintentional stains everywhere, we can guess that his nervous system is “overwhelmed” for some reason and that it is difficult or impossible for him to control his emotions and thus his actions at that moment. At school, such and similar processes may be interpreted as “negligence” and students will be criticized, given a bad grade, or even punished. What we see through the student’s artistic expression is actually a reflection of his inner state. By observing the student, his work process, his verbal and non-verbal expression, as well as the topic that is artistically processed, the art therapist will come to certain conclusions

and, with guided questions and non-judgmental observations, will help the student to become aware of himself and find the causes of his reactions. Thanks to the relationship of trust created between the student and the art therapist, the student comes to independent conclusions and connects the creation process, or the product itself, with his own life or current state. Instead of being criticized, excluded, or sanctioned for their behavior, through art therapy, students become active participant in understanding and resolving internal conflicts.

“Relationship is important in any form of psychotherapy. The relationship should have the quality of support and “holding” (so-called Winnicott’s “holding”) so that the person feels safe enough to search for and try out new artistic expressions, new thoughts, and feelings. We can talk about the need for curiosity that unites and emphasizes a sense of respect, appreciation, and caring, as well as a playful curiosity that allows for further and deeper exploration.”

H. Eberhart

The creative process is connected with solving problems, and the child adopts new patterns of behavior through play and creativity. It improves motor and sensory skills, attention, and social functions. The conscious use of artistic expression to release feelings or excess energy will empower the child and enable him to

learn about his own triggers, as well as ways of self-regulation. Art therapy allows students to work on obstacles that may hinder their success in education, guiding them through research and understanding of reluctance or difficulties related to a specific subject, the topic of the material, or perhaps with the teacher of that subject. The art therapist will offer creative methods of approaching the difficulty, and the child will sometimes unknowingly, through play and free and spontaneous expression, work on his blockage or problem.

For example, a hyperactive child often provokes adverse reactions from the environment, is punished for his behavior, and over time identifies himself through the comments of his peers, parents, and teachers, believing that it is not in his power to change anything. This feeling of incompetence gradually turns into aggressiveness, which can result in either delinquent behavior (outward aggression) or withdrawal, isolation, and self-injury (repressed anger).

If we direct the student towards artistic expression, he will channel his energy into something that will give appearance, form, color, or sound to his movement and become meaningful, creative, and visually accessible. The active involvement of students in a process that adapts and does not discriminate against their problem or symptom promotes the creation of a positive self-image. By focusing on creativity, bodily sensations, and emotions

within the creation process, the student enters into a dialogue with himself, allowing the body to tell its own story creatively and becoming more aware of his inner needs, triggers, and values. This knowledge greatly helps him understand himself, thus managing his emotions and self-regulation at school. Feelings of hopelessness, incompetence, and self-criticism are gradually transformed into feelings of strength, ability, and pride.

“When students feel good, they are free to focus on the learning process and direct their aspirations to the future.”

Isis, Bush, Siegel, Ventura

3. Discussion

3.1. Examples from Practice

3.1.1. Psychological and Medical Center for Children and Young People C.A.T.T.P. , Monaco

The center provides support for children with psychological difficulties or learning problems, as well as their families. Individual consultations and group workshops are held at the Center, depending on the child's needs (cognitive, psychomotor, educational, speech therapy, art therapy, horse riding therapy, logo-therapy, etc.). Parent-child support workshops are also held (Barkley method, parent-child art therapy workshop, etc.).

The Center is closely connected with the school system. Multidisciplinary meetings are organized throughout the year where a doctor (pediatric psychiatrist), therapists (psychologist, neuropsychologist, speech therapist, educator, special education teacher, social worker, art therapist), school staff (teachers, psychologists, directors, assistants, social workers) exchange information about the participants of the Center. Children are brought to the Center by teaching assistants because the workshops take place during school hours (classes last from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.).

At the beginning of each school year, the therapists of the Center organize lectures for the teaching assistants according to the problems that the assistants encounter when working with children. The topic is selected in cooperation with the assistants, depending on their needs and interests, and is presented and covered in theoretical lectures and practical workshops. The topic is observed from several points of view, depending on the lecturer's profession. Some topics are hypersensitivity in children with autism, how to deal with emotions, anxiety in children, alternative approaches to children with speech difficulties, etc.

Last year's theme was “Aggressiveness.” The author of the text, employed as an art therapist at the Center, organized an art therapy workshop with Dr. Renaud-Yang, a child psychiatrist and head of the Center. The goals of the workshop were as follows:

- Approaching and understanding the cause of aggression in children and young people.
- Raising awareness of one's attitude towards aggression.
- Finding a way to approach students.
- Familiarizing the assistants with the work process in art therapy.
- Sixty assistants were divided into three groups, and each workshop lasted for one hour.

The assistants were invited to recall situations related to aggression in their private lives or at school and to think and write their reaction to that behavior, but also to aggression in general (paying attention to all sensations and bodily experiences). They were surprised by the proposal because it is often customary to look for causes and solutions exclusively in children, forgetting the feelings of other participants in the system. The reaction of assistants, professors, and educators to the child's specific behavior, as well as their direct or indirect connection with a certain topic or issue in that process, is critical and forms part of the whole.

After stating their experiences, which remained anonymous, they were divided into two groups. Each group visually presented an individual experience using art techniques on large paper. Each person approached the piece, leaving a short note. There were different answers and approaches: coloring the paper with black pastels, drawing various symbols (e.g.,

red heart, question mark, thunder-bolt), making a sound by hitting the paper with pastels, but also staying aside and refusing to participate. Every answer was important: their "no" or "yes," their sounds, lines, colors, words, noise, or silence. Those who did not want to participate were still equal community members; they participated as observers and were not "stigmatized" as outsiders. Each individual got their place in the system.

This type of multimodal art therapy workshop (writing, drawing, movement, sound, improvisation) makes it possible to approach the problem creatively. No member is excluded because of his diversity; on the contrary, everyone participates in his own way. This specific workshop brought closer the understanding of a child with difficulties and his acceptance or non-acceptance in the system through personal examples and experiences. It emphasized the importance of working on sensitizing the entire system, not just the individual, and included creativity as a method of decentralization (we move away from the "problem," "indulging in imaginary reality through play, art creation, or ritual" and through the unplanned course of events we get to know something more about ourselves and possible solutions).

3.1.2. Private School, Monaco

The author of the text works several hours a week at school as an "Art education therapist," a combination of art edu-

cation professor and art therapist. She works individually with students aged 10 to 16. Prepares a work plan, determines learning goals, and designs the lecture structure depending on the student's age. She begins the class by discussing a predetermined art history topic, artist, or technique. Clarifies theory and facts by encouraging open communication. The examiner expresses his opinion on the subject, asks questions, and explains and supports her views by connecting them with his experiences. The author listens carefully to the student's presentation but also to the non-verbal components of the conversation. She is interested in the student's opinion and considers his point of view, although she may sometimes disagree with what is said. Art therapy experience significantly affects her role as a professor; she is sensitized for active listening, intuitive identification of emotions, and detection of possible difficulties and pathologies arising from relationships and the creative process (e.g., the need for perfectionism, harmful inner speech, lack self-confidence, suppressed emotions, dyslexia, etc.).

Artistic expression is inspired by a theory or an artist and serves as a starting point for creation but is not limited to a subject, technique, or way of working. The student is encouraged to find his own authentic, spontaneous expression, and he is encouraged in his creativity and observes where inspiration and imagination can lead him (in the choice of materials,

technique, and method of performance, but also in the way of thinking and feeling...). The concept of error does not exist in this process, only the possibility of broadening perspectives. Realizing that the creative process cannot be wrong or bad at any moment, the students experience various types of catharsis. Thanks to the benevolent and non-judgmental approach of the therapist, respect for the student and adaptation to his needs, and support of free research through verbal and creative expression, the student begins to feel safe enough, which leads him to let the control go. Emotions, psychological blocks, personal stories begin to surface, fears, limited beliefs, disappointment, and sadness, as well as the joy and excitement of discovering new creative attempts and experiencing yourself and your values.

By talking about symbols, lines, forms, colors, and the experienced work process, the student opens up in communication and often connects the external process with the internal. The author witnesses the positive effects of therapeutic teaching every day and studies the unpredictability and transformation of the path that the creative act brings with it. She is surprised that sometimes the student comes to class tired or listless but notices that as soon as he gives himself up to creation, he becomes present, his posture changes, his gaze becomes lively and curious, and ideas are born. It is easy to move from one medium to another; for example,

from the study and discussion of portraits in the history of art, a picture is created in clay that takes on a body and becomes a figure, which takes on a character and a story that we can relate to the student. The transformation is evident; the student who felt tired during the previous lesson, where he had to concentrate and solve specific tasks, suddenly becomes inspired and dynamic and does not want to leave after the end of the lesson. The author wonders what it would look like if creativity were an integral part of every subject and if teachers were provided with additional psycho-education to sensitize them to the psychological approach to students.

Active involvement through art leads to a new view of the topic, problem, perspective, and new knowledge. Art is not devoid of knowledge; without imagination, there is no learning. Every time we use a creative expression, we enter into problem-solving, and through creative processes, we get to know ourselves, the environment, relationships, life....

3.1.3. Conferences of Art Teachers and Visual Arts Teachers of Zadar County

In December of last year, the author participated in two conferences in Zadar County, where she presented art therapy to art teachers of upper grades of elementary schools and visual arts teachers at the School of Applied Art and Design in Zadar. A visual presentation

was needed to explain art therapy, from definitions and theory to concrete examples from practice. The children's artistic works drew teachers' attention to those elements of artistic works that should be given more attention, along with explaining pathologies and their recognition in creative work processes.

Examples of desirable ways to talk to students about their (student) work are presented. The gatherings were attended by a large number of teachers who were mostly unfamiliar with art therapy. Some stated that "if I had at least known before, I would have reacted differently," "now I understand why my student repeated certain symbols," "one student didn't want to draw anything, and I didn't know how to approach her, motivate her and evaluate her," etc. The author found it interesting to exchange experiences with teachers and answer their questions about concrete examples from school. In the next meeting at professional gatherings, the author plans to hold an art therapy workshop. An art professor and teacher at the School of Applied Art and Design summarized the review of her colleagues who attended the gathering (Appendix 1). The teacher points out that in working with high school art students, where art is an everyday way of expression, teachers can sense certain problems of students through their artworks. On the one hand, she wants to find out "how to help students while maintaining a sense of trust and some kind of authority and consistency."

On the other hand, she cites a system failure because some teachers come from academies and colleges with no courses in psychology and pedagogy and need help approaching certain problems. She further points out that art therapy in schools would be beneficial, especially in art schools, as well as the training of teachers who would be happy to take the time to get to know the way of working in art therapy “especially with an emphasis on concrete situations in the classroom and treatment due to problems.”

In the attached appendix, the art teacher notes that the lecture given by the author of this article interested a larger group of teachers in researching work methods in art therapy that could identify the problem, react legitimately, and contribute to students’ mental health.

The teacher metaphorically concludes, “We teach students that art can change the world, so the new approach could also change or shed light on some children’s inner worlds.”

The views of the teachers expressed in the text of colleague Vukojević speak of the actual necessity of understanding the child’s behavior in the educational environment, but also of the need for additional training of teachers or the inclusion of art therapists in the work of the school.

4. Conclusion

Art therapy in Croatia is in its infancy, so it is hard to expect that we will soon see it in the school system. Especially because there is a tendency to drop art culture in elementary schools from the regular program and reduce it to an elective subject. We have years of research and confirming results ahead of us before art therapy...

One should undoubtedly use the previous experiences, research, examples, and achievements of schools where art therapy is an integral part of the educational system and use and include in the program already tested methods and ways of working that have been proven effective.

Good results are the biggest drivers of change, and one teacher trained as an art therapist is enough to organize and lead art therapy workshops at school, to observe the development and functioning of an individual, a class, or an entire generation, and based on the results to assess and establish the effects of art therapy on students and society.

Art therapy reduces the stigma of mental health care, and the individual is encouraged to take care of himself and others. The ability to understand another person’s experience and identify the emotions associated with it, can foster a greater sense of community. It acts preventively, which can result in healthier and more socially acceptable behavior, increased self-esteem, acceptance of differences, and a more positive attitude about oneself, school, and learning.

If an individual understands and accepts his feelings and his authenticity and if he feels like an equal member of society in which his voice is essential, we will have a generation of satisfied students, ready to look at others through an empathetic prism, which can significantly reduce the number of problems that students face, from not finding one's way in the system, which results in future failed occupations, to violent behavior in schools or even numerous suicides by young people.

When considering the benefits of art therapy and all the ways in which it can ultimately contribute to the individual,

school, family, and society, it would be interesting to study the idea of its inclusion in the educational system. One of the projects the author is working on is creating a sensitization module for educators and professors for art therapy.

When introducing changes and innovations, the most important thing is for the school to see the interest and need to include art therapy in the school system and for all participants in the school system to agree on this idea because, without mutual approval and cooperation, it is impossible to start such a program.

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Appendix 1.

Text by Bojana Vukojević, professor of art pedagogy

“In working with students in the high school art education system, along with significant positive and motivating items, teachers often encounter problems that may not come to light in other types of high schools. This is an advantage because we can help the students. At the same time, it is a significant burden for the teacher who wonders if he might not be repaying the student with his attempts to provide questionable professional help. Have they added, Additionally? Most teachers feel frustrated that they face complex topics for which they were not previously prepared or did not face during their studies.”

Students' problems are diverse. We need to understand better and worse days and accordingly design completely new tasks and situations that will not harm the working atmosphere of the class.

Students with mental health problems show their condition in various ways, and sometimes, they keep silent about it, withdraw into themselves, and refuse to cooperate. How do you help students while maintaining a sense of trust and some authority and consistency? The secondary art school is staffed by teachers who have graduated from engineering faculties, design faculties, philosophy faculties, and art academies, as well as a smaller number of those who have been educated in art pedagogy. During their studies, some of the teachers never had courses related to child psychology, and there needs to be more professional training in this field. In addition, there is always some fear that they are not up to the problem and that their actions could worsen the situation.

The failure of the system is that they do not see child psychology and therapy as the most important courses that could prevent distress or that would at least suggest models that we could use in the school environment. Especially in art schools, art therapy should be given more importance, which would provide teachers with ways to approach a child with a problem at given times.

Likewise, by knowing some basic guidelines of art therapy, we could react quickly and get to the problem before it manifests itself in a more severe form. From the experience of the collective in which I work, most teachers would be willing to take their time and familiarize themselves with the basics of art therapy, mainly focusing on concrete situations in the class and treatment due to problems. We teach students that art can change the world, so a new approach could also change or shed light on some children's inner worlds.

Sabrina Mazzola Roguljić's lecture encouraged a larger group of teachers to take an additional interest in the topic. In an environment where we often feel helpless and powerless to help the student, the examples given by colleague Mazzola Roguljić were like a lifeline. So, is it really possible to identify a specific student problem? So, are there ways to calm the student down and encourage him to take further action in a positive direction? Can we use methods to help ourselves so that work stress does not become all-encompassing? If there is a possibility, teachers would definitely be willing to attend further lectures and workshops where they could learn about concrete situations with examples of art interventions that could ultimately significantly contribute to students' mental health."