

Significance of Therapeutic effects of Art and Art Making in Early Childhood Development

By: **Ms. Spriha Mukherjee**

Research Scholar

Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences

Amity University, Noida

Prof. (Dr.) Roopali Sharma

Associate Professor

Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences

Amity University, Noida

Abstract:

Early Childhood Development years are extremely important in determining a child's growth, development and involvement as an independent and healthy functional adult. This is the phase wherein their social, emotional, cognitive and behavioural aspects can either be positively impacted or negatively affected. The present research paper aims to study the significant and therapeutic role that art making plays, when introduced to a child's day-to-day life functioning during its growing years. Art Therapy has been a platform helping children find help to their psychological concerns and the given research takes the same into consideration as well while studying the independent effects of art-making.

The study follows the methodology of both systematic review of six significantly compatible researches to the key themes out of two hundred selected for screening, along with the content analysis of the same to observe and understand the key benefits that art making has to offer therapeutically. Results represent a positive relationship between early childhood phase and art making through observations that throws light towards feeling safe, comfortable, personality development, high aesthetic values towards life, high self-esteem, enhanced creative learning, meaning making and balanced behavioural conducts on part of participating children. Thus suggesting indulging and encouraging children in their early childhood years to participate in art making. A section of the research also highlights the significance of art making in terms of improving parent-child relationship when practised together by both parents and children.

Key Words: Art Making, Therapeutic effects, Early Childhood Development, Cognitive Development, Emotional Development, Social Development and Behavioural Development.

Introduction:

Early Childhood Development can be understood as the period of development from birth up until eight years of age. This is when the children get to explore their own ways of interacting and learning with their environment. Their social interaction abilities, their personality, their preferences and interests can all be seen coming over the surface to focus, but at the same time it should not be misunderstood that these skills, personality traits or preferences and interests shall get imbibed in the child permanently.

Development happens over the lifespan of an individual at different stages of life in relation to the kind of experiences and learning that takes place and hence behaviour patterns, social skills and qualities of their personalities may be modified as per the need of survival and management. Even though we may not consider the explorative journey of a child during early childhood phase to be determining any of these explorations, changes or learning to be permanent; but we may consider various influencing factors during this phase which shall complement the development during the early phase of childhood and even further. One such promising influencing factor is Art!

A child's artistic interactions and expressions can positively as well as significantly contribute to its development at social, physical, neurological, cognitive and emotional level. Thereby supporting the process of development tremendously. Art acts as a wonderful stimulation to the overall growth and development of a child given the therapeutic properties that it consists of, the impact of which may be observed at mental, emotional and behavioural

level. At times even at a spiritual level the children are able to practice mindfulness and pay attention to their compassionate self when such understandings are infused in them using art as tool.

Children love being creative and expressive and that's why when they are encouraged to interact with art in terms of learning new things, behaviours or experiences, it is a highly enjoyable process.

The therapeutic properties of art making also involves characteristics that makes children enjoy indulging in it and that too many a times they have been seen being indulged for long.

Some of the areas and skills we can see the children getting benefits can be observed as follows-

a. Social Skills:

During the Early childhood days, children tend to explore their potential of engaging socially through interactions, playing games or communication with peers, school and academics, as well as when meeting new individuals, visiting new places etc. The way they choose to interact and mingle with people and experiences at a social level is largely based upon their interest and their comfort. However it may not be limited to any certain preconceived ideas and hence can be modified to make better or most importantly healthy in its approach. So that growing up it may help the child feel more secure, comfortable and confident to indulge into social interactions. Through art children can be made to develop healthy social interactions and communication skills, especially because art shall help them express themselves freely at the same time in the most intimidating forms. In fact it is through art that they may be able to talk about things which otherwise becomes very difficult for them to strike a conversation upon.

b. Emotional Skills:

As we know that Emotional Regulation is not something that a child is born with. Over the period of time with experiences and learning the y first get to confront these different types of feelings they go through and eventually with better awareness they are able to learn to regulate their emotions too, which definitely through right guidance, understanding and support may grow better with time and age. For example many children during early childhood phase develop a sense of self based on their interactions with their peers, which leads to emotional, social and cognitive developments in turn. However, these children as they grow up may explore selves through their interactions with other individuals who participate in their environment or any other peer group they interact with, or even through the content they explore on media. When children during their early childhood phase are made to indulge in art making, such as creating images to express themselves or have an outlet to their emotions, or even to learn and remember more positive experiences visually, then art can be a great complementing tool.

c. Cognitive skills:

Cognitive skills at early childhood development phase may refer to the intellectual abilities of a child which may be observed. This includes simple to a little complex activities and interactions such as being able to recognize, memorize, take interest in things, learn behaviours, language, repeating stuffs, being able to balance their voluntary body movements, trying to frame a conversation using familiar words etc.

There have been studies implying that those children who have been engaged in art making throughout their early childhood development stage have been able to develop better cognitive skills resulting from better brain functioning capacity, same as that which can be seen when they play puzzles or any other game requiring mental.

d. Personality Development:

The personality of child starts to develop during their early childhood phase but may not comprise of any qualities, attributes or traits to become permanent within this stage as with time and experience these qualities and traits may get modified too. The development of the personality of a child takes place at different levels like emotional, social, intellectual and behavioural. While emotional aspects may comprise of level of self esteem, temperament, self respect, adjustment ability etc. the social aspects shall comprise of their ability to interact and bond with people, peers and family, or their ability to express and represent self in front of others. The intellectual ability shall involve their capacity to learn, memorize, recognize, relate or recall things and their behavioural aspect may include their approach towards others, their response and actions upon things and experiences or their expression of their interest and preferences.

Such behavioural regulation can be done through art making. In which either art can be performed and practised on regular basis in general so as to evoke qualities such as patience, tolerance, positive perspective and expressive self in them, or it can be a specific goal oriented process like in Art Therapy sessions.

Understanding Therapeutic Art

Therapeutic Art over can be understood as those properties and characteristics of process of art making, that supports, complements, and enhances the positive changes or results that one wishes to experience.

The properties that art making process consists of are -

- Helps feels relaxed and calm
- Supports enhancement of attention and focus
- Enhances Cognitive development and skills
- Helps with emotional release
- Helps in reflecting upon inner subconscious thoughts
- Strengthens insight creation
- Boosts Self-Esteem and Self-Concept
- Healthy tool for temperament management and emotional regulation
- Helps in improving and regulating social and behavioural skills etc.

The above mentioned points are some of the properties that the process of art-making holds which are therapeutic in nature and when brought in interaction with children, may highly foster their development needs. The word therapeutic is often only understood in relation to healing qualities, whereas when observed and seen from the perspective of psychology it can be understood as a characteristic properties of a process that aims to bring up desired results. Like, along with curation of a disease, it shall also help in positively influencing the thought patterns or lead to the generation of a healthy outlet to emotions.

Art making, Art Therapy both holds immense significance in terms of therapeutically impacting the development of children during their childhood and is often times referred to as the most useful as well as creative tool to engage children into healthy learning activities.

Reviews

Sometimes it has been seen that the process of making an art work is therapeutic as it provides a platform to the children wherein they feel safe in terms of expressing themselves to the concerned therapist. This helps us understand that when involved in doing art work, the children may be able to talk about their forms of expressions, create meaning out of them and find a sense of comfort in the presence of a therapist who makes an effort to be positive with his or her behaviour, which in turn positively influences their psychosocial outcomes (Liesbeth Bosgraaf et. al. 2020).

The connection and bond between children and their parents is essential in order to assure emotional security among them as they grow up. Also through studies it has been observed that the level of resilience among children tend to be better when they are brought up with enough emotional attention and care by their parents. This requires healthy interaction and regular efforts in creative ways to be encouraged on part of the parent and a recent study done (Victoria Gray Armstrong and Josephine Ross, 2022) on sixteen parents and their infants using art based intervention, have shown positive outcomes in the quality of parent-infant relationship through improved connection, shared attention and frequent eye contact.

Cognitive development in Children during early childhood phase is complemented when they are encouraged to participate in the process of their own learning that too in creative ways. Such a finding was made in a research study done in 2019 wherein it was observed that children who participate in their own learning through creative means, are more expressive over their art work.

(Dipanwita Ray, 2019). Art is not about the product but process which involves the transformation of scribbles and scratches into drawings, paintings and images in early childhood period.

The process of introducing art as a tool of early childhood development has been found promising in association to all type of children, as well as the results have been equally beneficial. For example when it comes to cognitive, social, emotional expression and behavioural skills; both children with special needs or others can be equally observed to be helped and benefited through their participation in art making (Kimberly Lloyd Dominican, 2017). Such results are not temporary or oriented to the phase of participation but show their significant impact in the long run too, as the child keep growing with time.

As a child grows up, in that process he/she encounters various learning and experiences that define the type of personality that builds up, their level of self esteem, their aesthetic values towards life, respect for self and others etc. Through an interesting research conducted in year 2014, it was observed that when children in their phase of growing up (early childhood phase) are introduced to art making , the therapeutic effects lead them to be having a balanced personality growing up, their aesthetic values towards life gets enhanced as well as level of self esteem, self- respect, ability to adjust etc. gets strengthened for good (Asuman Aypek Arslan; 2014).

Forty one children were divided into three experimental group and were provided with art materials. These children were ranging from regressive to controlled type, to study their psychological effect on the level of aggression, self-esteem, anxiety and self-control. The study done (Tamar Pessa et.al; 2014) found significant difference in the pre and post assessment that displayed difference between one or two aspect, hence concluding that the choice of material do have a therapeutic effect and hence it should be wisely selected.

This doesn't limit the scope of participation in the process of art making to just certain type of materials, this suggests us that we can also specifically look into some art materials when aiming to ensure that the results shall be therapeutic.

Methodology:

Systematic Review Based Content Analysis

Themes: Cognitive, Social, Emotional and Behavioural

Aim:

Understanding Significance of Therapeutic Art and Art Making in Early Childhood Development

Objective:

To study, analyse and learn about the benefits of therapeutic effects of art and art making during the early childhood development period.

Hypotheses:

These shall be a positive relationship existing between therapeutic effects of art, art making and its practice during early childhood period.

Study Design

Eligibility Criteria

The research studies selected for analysis and synthesis of results were segregated based on key words which are “art making”, “Therapeutic effects of art”, “Early Childhood”, “Children” and “Relationship”

Information sources

The search for relevant articles, fully accessible research papers and abstract reviews were carried out during the month of February 2022 till April 2021. Major electronic databases were taken into consideration for searching suitable content for the purpose of study and analysis. These electronic databases included Scopus, Web of Science, Frontiers, Research Gate, Google Scholar, PsycInfo, Publons, and Clarivate.

Search Strategy

We limited our search for suitable articles to research review articles, or scientific blog articles published during the past ten years for the purpose of studying, analysing and obtaining results as well as observations which are more recent, holding continued relevancy.

Selection Process

The articles were screened in three stages; the first stage comprised of articles being screened based on year of publication, themes, and their concerned area of study. In the second stage the articles screened during stage one were further reviewed by both the authors, and those were identified which were relevant to the aim and objective of executing this research study. In the final stage those articles were screened for both subjective and objective analysis which had considerable data for reflection and insights.

Data Collection Process

The purpose of the study was to collect research articles or articles based on the key words selected. The division of search of articles was based on searches from databases and other sources. Number of articles reviewed per journal were two hundred, out of which minimum six were selected for the purpose of study and analysis and finally one theme per article was screened for further study and understanding.

Study Synthesis:

Non-Quantitative Systematic Review was carried out followed by content analysis of Research Review Articles, Scientific Blog Articles, Open access research articles as well as both structured and unstructured abstracts were studied in detail to understand and select those complimenting the aim and objective of the research study.

Focus was given on year, author, title, concerns, population, methods and results obtained. Both reviewers studied the findings and outcomes of researches and synthesized the themes arising in order to study and analyse them in reference the criteria of collection.

Assessment of Biases

The JBI Critical Appraisal Tool Checklist for Qualitative Research was referred to for assessing the level of biases existing in the research studies taken into consideration.

Synthesis:

For Content Analysis: Unit Creation

Table 1.1

Meaning Units	Condensed Units
An Art work is therapeutic as it provides a platform to the children wherein they feel safe in terms of expressing themselves. Children may be able to talk about their forms of expressions, create meaning out of them and find a sense of comfort in the presence of a therapist who makes an effort to be positive with his or her behaviour, which in turn positively influences their psychosocial outcomes.	Provides a platform to the children wherein they feel safe in terms of expressing themselves. Able to talk about their forms of expressions, create meaning out of them and find a sense of comfort in the presence of a therapist.
The level of resilience among children tend to be better when they are brought up with enough emotional attention and care by their parents. Study done on sixteen parents and their infants using art based intervention, have shown positive outcomes in the quality of parent-infant relationship through improved connection, shared attention and frequent eye contact.	The level of resilience among children tend to be better when they are brought up with enough emotional attention and care by their parents. Art based intervention, have shown positive outcomes in the quality of parent-infant relationship through improved connection, shared attention and frequent eye contact.

Table 1.2

Meaning Units	Condensed Units
Cognitive development in Children during early childhood phase is complemented when they are encouraged to participate in the process of their own learning that too in creative ways. Children who participate in their own learning through creative means, are more expressive over their art work. Art is not about the product but process which involves the transformation of scribbles and scratches into drawings, paintings and images in early childhood period.	Cognitive development in Children during early childhood phase is complemented when they are encouraged to participate in the process of their own learning that too in creative ways. Art is not about the product but process which involves the transformation of scribbles and scratches into drawings, paintings and images.
When it comes to cognitive, social, emotional expression and behavioural skills; both children with special needs or others can be equally observed to be helped and benefited through their participation in art making.	Both children with special needs or others can be equally observed to be helped and benefited through their participation in art making.
When children in their phase of growing up (early childhood phase) are introduced to art making, the therapeutic effects lead them to be having a balanced personality growing up, their aesthetic values towards life gets enhanced as well as level of self esteem, self-respect, ability to adjust etc. gets strengthened for good.	Therapeutic effects lead them to be having a balanced personality growing up, their aesthetic values towards life gets strengthened as well as level of self esteem, self-respect, ability to adjust etc.

Table 1.3

Meaning Units	Condensed Units
Forty one children were divided into three experimental group and were provided with art materials. These children were ranging from regressive to controlled type, to study their psychological effect on the level of aggression, self-esteem, anxiety and self-control. The study done (Tamar Pessa et.al; 2014) found significant difference in the pre and post assessment that displayed difference between one or two aspect, hence concluding that the choice of material do have a therapeutic effect and hence it should be wisely selected.	The study done found significant difference in the pre and post assessment that displayed difference between Level of aggression, self-esteem, anxiety and self-control, hence concluding that the choice of material do have a therapeutic effect and hence it should be wisely selected.

Categorization and Theme synthesis:

Table 2.

Sub Category (from Condensed Units)	Category	Codes
Feel safe in terms of expressing themselves. Able to talk about their forms of expressions, create meaning and find a sense of comfort.	Feel Safe Expressing, Talking about forms, create meaning and find sense of comfort.	Feels Safe, Expression, Meaning Creation and Sense of Comfort.

Table 2.1

Sub Category (from Condensed Units)	Category	Codes
Art based intervention, have shown positive outcomes in the quality of parent-infant relationship through improved connection, shared attention and frequent eye contact.	Art based intervention, shown positive outcomes in the quality of parent-infant relationship through improved connection, shared attention and frequent eye contact.	Positive Parent and Infant Relationship quality.
Cognitive development is complemented through participation in the process of their own learning in creative ways and are more expressive over their art work. Art is about the process involving transformation of scribbles and scratches into drawings, paintings and images.	Cognitive Development through participation in creative learning. Process of Transformation of scribbles and scratches to images. More Expression over Art.	Cognitive Development, Creative Learning, Expression over Art, Process and Transformation.
Both children with special needs or others can be equally observed to be helped and benefited through their participation in art making.	Children with special needs or others can be equally benefited.	Benefit to all children.

Table 2.3

Sub Category (from Condensed Units)	Category	Codes
Therapeutic effects lead to a balanced personality growing up, aesthetic values towards life gets enhanced so does level of self esteem, self-respect, ability to adjust etc.	Therapeutic Effects leads to a balanced personality and enhanced aesthetics towards values of life.	Therapeutic effects, Balanced Personality, Enhanced aesthetics, and values of life.
Significant difference in the pre and post assessment that displayed difference between Level of aggression, self-esteem, anxiety and self-control. The choice of material do have a therapeutic effect and hence it should be wisely selected.	Significant difference among Level of aggression, self-esteem, anxiety and self-control. Choice of material do have a therapeutic effect	Significant difference, aggression, self-esteem, anxiety, self-control, Choice of Material and Therapeutic Effect.

Result Analysis:

Table 3.

Themes	Codes	Frequencies
Cognitive	Meaning Creation, Creative Learning	4
Emotional	Safe, Enhanced Self Esteem, Self Respect, Reduced Aggression	4
Social	Strong Aesthetics, Improved ability to Adjust	2
Behavioural	Expression, Positive Child and Parent Relationship, Balanced Personality	3

The table 3 represents the number of codes that occurred per theme selected to study, analyse and understand the significance of art making in the early childhood development phase. We can observe in the above given table (Table 3) that art making stands to be supportive towards cognitive development through meaning creation and creative learning, it can be found supporting emotional development through enhancement of self esteem, self respect, sense of feeling safe and reduction of anger. Likewise it can be seen supporting social development through improved ability to adjust as well as strong aesthetic sense towards values of life. And finally towards behavioural development through improvement and management of personality, expression of self and better parent-child relationship.

Table 4

S.No.	Title	Author and year	Methodology	Results
1.	The Experience of Parents and Infants using a Home based Art Intervention Aimed at Improving Well-Being and Connectedness in their Relationship.	Gray Victoria Armstrong and Josephine Ross; 2022	Art based intervention with 40 families having children between age 0-3, followed by thematic analysis.	Art based interventions helped in improving the Parent-child relationship quality.
2.	Art Therapy for Psychosocial Problems in Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Narrative Review on Art Therapeutic Means and Forms of Expression, Therapist Behaviour and Supposed Mechanisms of Change.	Liesbeth Bosgraaf et. al. 2020	Systematic review of 37 research articles out of 1299.	Children were able to feel safe to express themselves, create meaning and find a sense of comfort in the presence of the therapist.
3.	Art and Creativity in Early Childhood.	Dipanwita Ray; 2019	Qualitative analysis of expressions of children arising from art based experiments.	Art is a process and not product. Children participate in their own learning through art based methods.
4.	Benefits of Art Education	Lloyd Kimberly; 2017	Qualitative analysis based on Literature review.	Art provided benefits to children both from the general as well as special education background in areas of social and behaviour.
5.	A Study into the Effects of Art Education on Children at the Socialisation Process.	Asuman Aypek Arslan; 2014	Perspective Article	Art Education helps children with better self esteem, self respect, improved personality over time as well as balanced behaviour.
6.	The Unique Therapeutic effect of different Art Materials on Psychological aspects of 7- to 9-year-old Children.	Tamar Pessó Aviv et.al; 2014	Ten Sessiontherapeutic experiment on forty one children using art material.	Typeof material shall determinethe therapeutic effects.

Discussion and Conclusion

Early Childhood Period can be observed and understood as a significant time period demanding focus on the overall development of the child. When in these years, especially between age group 0- 7 years as regarded; the child irrespective of its level of potential deserves to be encouraged to participate in one's own learning, yielding into significant improvements in various areas. The current study through its qualitative means aimed to observe, analyse

and understand how art making or art education , or interaction with art in day to day life may therapeutically contribute to the development of the child.

Through review of previous literature and its content analysis we could specifically identify areas of potential benefit for children in terms of participating in art making process. It was learned that when a child is encouraged into art making or art education, it helps with the improvement in their level of self esteem, self respect, management of aggression, enhancing feeling of being safe and comfortable as well as holding higher aesthetic towards values of life. Continued interaction with art making as a process can help improve their personality in the long run as well as lead to balanced behavioural conducts. Also, when participating in art related activities along with parents can lead to improved parent child relationship quality. And the list doesn't end here, it has been seen that indulging into one's own learning process through creative means can help a child have creative learning and meaning creation over their expression of self.

This helps us understand that art making or art education, art related activities are not only focusing on any one single area with regard to its scope of benefits, but an entire range comprising of Cognitive, Emotional, Social and Behavioural aspects. It shall be important to explore through more quantitative researches how the scope of therapeutic benefits of art upon children during their early childhood development age can be enhanced.

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