

ART THERAPY AS A HEALING CONCEPT FOR THE MENTALLY CHALLENGED: ARTISTIC APPROACH

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Creative expression has been used for healing the sick from the traditional period till the present day. The Holy Bible recorded the earliest healing in history of mankind, a bible quotation that says “And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul that David took a harp, and played with his hand so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him”. This form of healing therapy was repeatedly done by David to get King Saul out of his psychiatric problem as recorded in the Bible. In the discipline of Art Therapy, “artist explained themselves with their inner images as reference to reality.

The word “therapy” originated from Greek word Therapies, which means “to be attentive to” this can be explained with a skilled professional in one hand is attending to an individual who is making the art. This skilled professional’s guidance is a key to the process of therapy. Art therapy can be described as Creative and Expressive art form. Expressive art therapy includes art and dementia, dance therapy, drama therapy, music therapy, and writing therapy. Unlike traditional art expression, the process of creation is emphasized in creative and expressive art therapy rather the final product”. The term "learning disabilities" is used, to describes a group of disorders characterized by inadequate development of specific academic, language, and speech skills, (Wadsworth, 2008), He further explained types of learning disabilities to include reading disability (dyslexia), mathematics disability (dyscalculia) and writing disability (dysgraphia).

Art therapy or other aspect of field of therapy has started gaining recognition among educator's psychiatry, psychology, counselors, and artists." It is equally important to note that educators in general have started discovering that children's art expressions, reflects developmental, emotional and cognitive growth as a criteria to learning and healing of the mentally challenged children. Hospitals, clinics and rehabilitation centers has increasingly began to include art therapy programs along with traditional "talk therapies" underscoring the recognition that creative process of art, making the profession of art therapy to grow into effective method of communication, assessment and treatment with children and adults in a variety of settings.

Occupational therapy is an aspect of art therapy, occupation as they affect a particular ailment towards the same improvement or healing of a particular person or patients. Vocational therapy is often used in combination with a structured rehabilitation program and is designed to enable the disabled individual to resume productive employment. Individuals who have experienced changes in their mental or physical function due to illness or injury may require vocational therapy to allow them to return to work. It also works with individuals and their new physical or mental statues to find an appropriate occupational match.

According to American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA 2008), it is "the therapeutic use of work, self-care, and play activities to increase development and prevent disability. It may include adaption of task or environment to achieve maximum independence a and to enhance the quality of life". Common Vocational or Occupational therapy intervention include helping children with disabilities to participate fully in school and situations, helping people recovering from injury to regain skills, and providing supports for older adults experiencing physical and cognitive changes. Occupational therapy therefore is a profession concerned with promoting health and well being through engagement in occupation, "It is a holistic health care profession that aims to promote health by enabling individuals to perform meaningful and purposeful activities across the lifespan. Occupational therapists use treatments to develop, recover, or maintain the daily living and work skills of their patients with physical, mental or developmental condition.

The major difference between art therapy and vocational therapy is that art therapy emphasizes on the process through which the clients interact with the media and or materials which is based on the belief that creative process that involves self-expression helps people to resolve conflicts and problems, develop interpersonal skills, manage behavior, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and self-awareness, while occupational therapy focuses on the acquisition of skill or the end product of the clients. Occupational or vocational therapy works with individuals and their new physical or mental statues to find an appropriate occupational match through engagement in skillful activities. It is clear from the on –going that art therapy and occupational therapy seem intertwined, creative process that leads clients out of depression, anger, fear, reduces stress, increase self esteem awareness, and so on., would aid their affective domain and form basis for occupational therapy to thrive. The processes involved during occupational or vocational therapy translate to art therapy.

Art Therapy and Other Forms of Therapy

Among all forms of expressive art therapy that use dance, music or drama and writing, art therapy stands in contrast with them because art therapy can be successfully applied to clients with physical, mental or emotional problems, disease or disorders. This is supported by Gamin (1999) “art therapy encourages people to express and understand emotions through artistic expression and through the creative process”. A more lucid definition given by AATA (2010) refers to “art therapy as a mental health profession that uses the creative process of art making to improve and enhance the physical, mental and emotional well–being of individuals of all ages. It is based on the belief that the creative process involved in artistic self - expression helps people to resolve conflicts and problems, develop interpersonal skills, manage behavior, reduces stress, increase self esteem and self awareness and achieve insight.

Art therapy therefore is a process that uses drawing ink, crayons, pastel, charcoal, colors, clay, fabrics, strings, wood, paper, adhesives, glazes, canvas and natural items (like shell, leaves and seeds and so on) as means of assessment and treatment. Although art therapists have generated many definition of art therapy, most of them fall into one or two general categories:

Firstly, according to Malchodi (2006) it involves a belief inherent healing power of the creative process of art making. The view embraces the idea that process of making art is therapeutic. This means art is seen as an opportunity to express one's self imaginatively, authentically and spontaneously, an experience that overtime, can lead to a personal fulfillment, emotional reparation and recovery. Here the main focus of the artist or therapist is to raise the patients' students' awareness, most importantly the process of creativity, the crucial and finite development which takes place when one involves in the art.

The second dwells on the belief that art is a means of symbolic communication; this approach is often referred to as Art psychotherapy, which emphasizes the product drawings, painting and other art expressions that are helpful in communicating issues, emotion and conflicts. The art image becomes significant in enhancing verbal exchange between the person and the therapist in achieving insight; resolving conflicts, solving problems, and formulating new perception that in turn lead to positive changes, growth and healing in individuals with disability. The therapist interprets the Client's symbolic self expression, as communicated in the art, and elicits interpretation from the client. In line with the above Otunaiya (2009) states that the art therapist are trained to recognize the nonverbal symbols and metaphors that are communicated within the creative process, symbols and metaphors which might be difficult to express in words or other modalities. By helping their clients to discover what underlying thoughts and feelings are being communicated in the artwork and what it means to them, it is hoped that clients will not only gain insight and judgment, but perhaps develop a better understanding of themselves and the way they relates to the people around them. In a sense, art therapy and psychotherapy are used to improve the health status of the client.

Gamin (1999) led credence to the above assertion, that art therapists feel that both the idea that art making can be a healing process and that art products communicates information relevant to therapy are important. Therefore it is a two part process, involving both the creation of art and the discovery of its meaning.

Art therapy can be described as Expressive Art or Art Psychology which encourages self- discovery and emotional growth. By the definition it follows that it involves both the creation of art and the discovery of its meaning. Art therapy could be based on the assumption

that ‘visual symbols and images are the most accessible and natural form of communication to the human experience’ (American Art therapy Association, AATA). Going by this assumption patient with disability are encourages to visualize, and then create the thoughts and emotions that they cannot talk about. When the resulting art work is created by the artist, the work is then reviewed by the creator. Art therapy predates both psychology and psychiatry.

Prehistoric man or the cave men believed that making drawing and engraving of animals on the cave walls provided a magical power to kill animals in the bush during their era. In the same vain employing artistic visual symbols for psychological connection could be a good sign of art therapy for the early hunters who believed in the religious and magical power of the symbols. Human beings have always expressed themselves with symbols throughout history. Africa, mask, ritual pottery, costumes, and ritual objects of shrines, cave drawings and Egyptian hieroglyphics are among visual objects of therapy in the early period. In some other places or parts of the world Celtic arts symbols are all visual records of self- expression and communication through art, Art according to Oloidi, (1969) art has been associated with religious and spiritual powers as envisaged by the early Christian Missionaries in Nigeria.

The development of Art Therapy has undergone a long period of gestation, followed by a period of spectacular growth. In the 19th century, French psychiatrist Ambrose Tardieu and Paul- Max Simon published studies on the similar characteristics of symbolism in artwork of the mentally ill. Both researchers viewed art therapy as an effective diagnostic tool to identify specific types of mental illnesses or traumatic events (AATA).

Art Therapy has been developed in United State of America by Margaret Naumburg when she incorporated art into psychology as a means for patient to visualize and recognize the unconsciousness (American Art Therapy Association) The Association further stated that she founded the Walden School in 1915 where she used student’s art works in psychological counseling. In Canada Art Therapy was introduced by Dr. Martin A. Fisher, Selwyn and Irene Dewdry and Maria Revai in 1940. The word therapy is generally used in medicine but the use of art in this operation is not common with artist in Nigeria. American Art Therapy

Association (AATA) defined Art Therapy as treatment that ‘encourages people to express and understand emotions through the creative process’ Art Therapy provides the artist- client with critical insight into emotion, thoughts and feelings. Some important benefits of Art Therapy process have been identified, these includes but not limited to the following:

Empowerment through Art Therapy

Empowerment through art therapy can encourage disabled individuals in different ways.

Self- discovery- art therapy triggers an emotional catharsis

Personal fulfillment- creation of tangible reward can built confidence and nurture feelings of self- worth.

Empowerment-Art therapy can help people visually express emotions and fears that they cannot express through conventional means.

Relaxation and Stress relief- chronic stress can be harmful to both mind and body. Stress can weaken and damage the immune system, can cause insomnia and depression, and can trigger high blood pressure and irregular heartbeats. Art therapy can effectively relieve stress.

Symptom relief and physical rehabilitation–it can help patient cope with pain, promote physiological healing among others.

Art therapy combines the creative process and psychotherapy; facilitating self-exploration and understanding. Using imagery, color and shape as part of this creative therapeutic process, Empowerment through art therapy thoughts and feelings can be expressed that would otherwise be difficult to articulate

Disability, Learning Disorder and Learning Difficulty,

Learning disability is a classification that includes several areas of functioning in which a person has difficulty learning in a typical manner, usually caused by an unknown factor or factors. The following terms could be often used interchangeably, in many ways: *learning disability*, *learning disorder* and *learning difficulty*, they differ in many ways. Learning disability refers to significant learning problems in an

academic area. These problems, however, are not enough to warrant an official diagnosis. Learning disorder, on the other hand, is an official clinical diagnosis, whereby the individual meets certain criteria, as determined by a professional (psychologist, pediatrician, and so on.) The difference is in degree, frequency, and intensity of reported symptoms and problems, and thus the two should not be confused. When the term "learning disabilities" is used, it describes a group of disorders characterized by inadequate development of specific academic, language, and speech skills. Thomson (2008), classified types of learning disabilities include reading disability (dyslexia), mathematics disability (dyscalculia) and writing disability (dysgraphia).

The unknown factor is the disorder that affects the brain's ability to receive and process information. This disorder can make it problematic for a person to learn as quickly or in the same way as someone who is not affected by a learning disability. People with a learning disability have trouble performing specific types of skills or completing tasks if left to figure things out by themselves or if taught in conventional ways.

Individuals with learning disabilities can face unique challenges that are often pervasive throughout the lifespan. Depending on the type and severity of the disability, interventions and current technologies may be used to help the individual learn strategies that will foster future success. Some interventions can be quite simplistic, while others are intricate and complex. Current technologies may require student training to be effective classroom supports. Teachers, parents and schools can create plans together that tailor intervention and accommodations to aid the individual in successfully becoming independent learners. School psychologists and other qualified professionals quite often help design the intervention and coordinate the execution of the intervention with teachers and parents. Social support may improve the learning for students with learning disabilities.

Learning disability could equally be describe as: a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities. Learning disabilities fall into broad categories based on the four stages of information processing used in learning:

input, integration, storage, and output. National Dissemination center for Children with Disabilities

- **Input:** This is the information perceived through the senses, such as visual and auditory perception. Difficulties with visual perception can cause problems with recognizing the shape, position and size of items seen. There can be problems with sequencing, which can relate to deficits with processing time intervals or temporal perception. Difficulties with auditory perception can make it difficult to screen out competing sounds in order to focus on one of them, such as the sound of the teacher's voice. Some children appear to be unable to process tactile input. For example, they may seem insensitive to pain or dislike being touched.
- **Integration:** This is the stage during which perceived input is interpreted, categorized, placed in a sequence, or related to previous learning. Students with problems in these areas may be unable to tell a story in the correct sequence, unable to memorize sequences of information such as the days of the week, able to understand a new concept but be unable to generalize it to other areas of learning, or able to learn facts but be unable to put the facts together to see the "big picture." A poor vocabulary may contribute to problems with comprehension.
- **Storage:** Problems with memory can occur with short-term or working memory, or with long-term memory. Most memory difficulties occur in the area of short-term memory, which can make it difficult to learn new material without many more repetitions than is usual. Difficulties with visual memory can impede learning to spell.
- **Output:** Information comes out of the brain either through words, that is, language output, or through muscle activity, such as gesturing, writing or drawing. Difficulties with language output can create problems with spoken language, for example, answering a question on demand, in which one must retrieve information from storage, organize our thoughts, and put the thoughts into words before we speak. It can also cause trouble with written language for the same reasons. Difficulties with motor abilities can cause problems with gross and fine motor

skills. People with gross motor difficulties may be clumsy, that is, they may be prone to stumbling, falling, or bumping into things. They may also have trouble running, climbing, or learning to ride a bicycle. People with fine motor difficulties may have trouble buttoning shirts, tying shoelaces, or with handwriting.

The causes for learning disabilities are not well understood, and sometimes there is no apparent cause for a learning disability. However, some causes of neurological impairments include: Heredity – Learning disabilities often run in the family. Children with learning disabilities are likely to have parents or other relatives with similar difficulties, (National Center for Learning Disabilities 2009).

- Problems during pregnancy and birth – Learning disabilities can result from anomalies in the developing brain, illness or injury, fetal exposure to alcohol or drugs, low birth weight, oxygen deprivation, or by premature or prolonged labor.
- Accidents after birth – Learning disabilities can also be caused by head injuries, malnutrition, or by toxic exposure (such as heavy metals or pesticides).

Summary

Conclusively, art therapy is a mental health profession that uses the creative process of art making to improve and enhance the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals off all ages. It is based on the belief that the creative process that involves self- expression helps people to resolve conflicts and problems, develop interpersonal skills, manage behavior, reduces stress, increase self- esteem and self – awareness, and achieve insight as confirmed by Sigmund Freud in Otunaiya O. (2009) in his early studies of psychoanalysis discovered that artworks done by disturbed patients could communicate patient emotion and events that language could not. He found out that images were less anxiety provoking forms of communication. It is therefore a field that integrates the field of human development, that is visual art

(drawing, painting, music, drama, sculpture, and other art forms), and the creative process with models of counseling and psychotherapy.

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