

6. THE USEFULNESS OF ART THERAPY TECHNIQUES IN EDUCATIONAL COUNSELING

Maria Corcevoi²²⁶

Abstract: *Art therapy techniques are essential in educational counseling, particularly in the context of globalization and digitalization, where stress, anxiety, social isolation, and informational overload increasingly impact students' mental health. Art therapy provides a creative means to address these challenges through activities such as drawing, painting, or modeling, allowing students to express emotions and thoughts non-verbally, thereby relieving tension. Artistic expression not only facilitates access to emotions and experiences but also offers a context in which clients can creatively reshape their self-perception and personal experiences. This process supports healing and personal development, solidifying art therapy as a valuable method in educational and psychological counseling.*

Key words: *Art therapy, educational counseling, mental health, personal development, emotions and thoughts*

1. Introduction

In the current context of accelerated globalization and digitalization, society faces a variety of complex psychological challenges, such as increased levels of stress and anxiety, social isolation caused by technological dependency, and informational overload generated by unlimited access to digital resources. These difficulties profoundly affect not only individuals' mental health but also the dynamics of interpersonal relationships and performance across various life domains. In this context, psychological services become critically important. Psychological intervention is not merely about addressing existing problems but also plays a key role in preventing their escalation and strengthening individuals' internal resources. A psychologist is not just a specialist intervening in times of crisis but also a trusted partner who provides a safe and understanding environment. Through support, empathy, and tailored interventions, psychologists contribute to restoring emotional balance, fostering resilience, and improving quality of life.

2. Discussions

Amid constant challenges, psychological services are no longer optional but a necessity, addressing a fundamental need for mental health and well-being in a society continually adapting to the rapid changes of the modern world. Psychological services provide a general framework that integrates psychological and educational counseling, ensuring a multidimensional approach to problems. While psychological counseling focuses on emotional balance and personal adaptation, educational counseling introduces a specific dimension related to education, targeting educational subjects such as students, pupils, or adults in learning processes, as well as their educational partners (parents, teachers, employers).

Educational counseling stands out as a vital component in the process of shaping human personality, emphasizing individuals' ability to develop autonomy

²²⁶ Lecturer PhD., "Alec Russo" State University, Bălți, Republic of Moldavia, email: corcevoimaria981@gmail.com, ID ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0229-8616>

and competencies to manage life's complex demands. By teaching essential strategies and skills, educational counseling helps individuals modify their cognitions and behaviors, manage emotions, resolve internal conflicts, improve interpersonal relationships, and make responsible decisions, all of which contribute to their optimal functioning. As I. Holdevici (1998) emphasizes, optimal functioning is achieved when individuals master the fundamental skills needed to cope with life's demands [apud 1].

Although educational counseling and the teaching-education process share the common goal of shaping human personality, they differ in their approach and the skills involved. Teachers and educators are primarily responsible for imparting knowledge and developing the cognitive skills necessary for the learning process. In contrast, educational counselors focus on supporting the holistic development of the individual, addressing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions to ensure optimal adaptation to the educational and social environment. According to Dumitru I. Al. (2008), teachers exercise their role predominantly in the realm of academic instruction, providing a structured framework for learning and cognitive development.

Educational counselors, however, extend this process through personalized interventions tailored to the individual's specific needs. Thus, educational counseling intervenes where the traditional learning process encounters difficulties or where emotional and behavioral blockages arise, facilitating a process of adaptation and personal optimization [1, p. 11]. Educational counseling sits at the intersection of science and art, functioning as a "psycho-educational technology" that rigorously applies scientific principles while creatively adapting to the individual needs and context of each person. It is a field of effective action, where success depends not only on validated scientific truths but also on their specific application. Its efficiency lies in applying scientific principles in a manner tailored to the living, concrete individual and the specific moment of intervention, offering a practical and effective solution to the complex challenges of contemporary life.

Just as educational counseling is defined by the personalized application of scientific principles, art therapy demonstrates its effectiveness through the creative transformation of the emotional and cognitive realities of its subjects. Art therapy aligns perfectly with the educational counseling process, illustrating that this field is not limited to a technological approach but also incorporates an artistic dimension. It provides clear evidence of how tested and validated scientific methods can be used in a creative, personalized, and flexible way to support personality development and address the varied and complex challenges of educational beneficiaries.

Art therapy (from Latin *ars* – art, and Greek *therapeia* – treatment), defined as a therapeutic method based on artistic creativity, is a specialized form of psychotherapy grounded in visual and creative activities. The origins of this practice, named by English physician and artist Adrian Hill in 1938, lie at the intersection of art and science. As an interdisciplinary phenomenon, art therapy integrates achievements from fields such as pedagogy, culture, sociology, and other sciences, granting it universal applicability. Through its methodological diversity, art therapy not only addresses issues of social and psychological maladaptation but

also contributes to the development of human potential, enhancing psychological and spiritual health. This demonstrates its flexibility and relevance in multiple contexts. These methods use creative activities as a means for clients to express their psychological state in various forms. Today, art therapy is increasingly perceived as a progressive psychological support tool that fosters the formation of healthy, creative personalities and fulfills several socializing functions for individuals (adaptive, regulatory, corrective, rehabilitative, mobilizing, and preventive).

The art therapy process has unique characteristics, as the relationship between the client and the educational counselor is mediated through the creative product (drawing, story, dance, musical composition, etc.), which reflects the beneficiary's process of artistic expression. The creative potential exists within every individual, hidden at various levels of the subconscious, and can be brought to the surface only through an approach tailored to each person's individuality. Creativity encompasses all forms of generating and manifesting novelty against the backdrop of existing patterns or structures. The creative process involves three main stages:

- Creating new forms that have not existed before.
- Modifying, updating, and perfecting existing structures.
- Destroying old structures and replacing them with new ones.

A creative person is capable of interpreting ordinary information in an original way, transforming sensory data into something new and significantly superior to what existed before. Art therapy facilitates the release of an individual's creative potential, helping them explore and integrate elements discovered in their inner world into external reality. The principle of art therapy, based on catharsis—the emotional purification described by Aristotle—relies on the idea that through creating a work of art, the individual can transfer their subconscious emotions and conflicts onto an external medium. This process allows them to observe themselves from a detached perspective, realize that they and their problems are not the same, and thus create space for introspection and healing. In its early stages, art therapy was profoundly influenced by psychoanalysis, which viewed creative products—such as drawings, paintings, or sculptures—as symbolic manifestations of unconscious processes.

Inspired by the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung, art therapy operates on the principle that the unconscious reveals itself through symbolic images. Freud argued that primary thoughts and emotions originating from the subconscious are expressed through images and symbols. Jung, in turn, recommended drawing as a means of exploring the unconscious, stating that "we think in visual images, and these form the basis of painting." Margaret Naumburg, trained in the psychoanalytic tradition, was the first to use art as a therapeutic technique, emphasizing spontaneous drawing. She demonstrated that artistic expression could serve as a foundation for exploring and interpreting internal conflicts, reflecting unconscious processes such as fears, inner struggles, childhood memories, or dreams.

Established as a therapeutic practice in the 1970s, art therapy focuses on a simple principle: the emotions evoked by contact with a work of art or the act of creation provoke catharsis (purification), as described by Aristotle. When individuals become creators, they project their subconscious experiences and conflicts onto an external medium—canvas, paper, or other artistic formats. This

allows them to view themselves from a detached perspective and conclude, "I am not the same as my problem." The counselor, in turn, interprets the client's artistic creations, deciphering the symbols and emotions they reflect. Through this analysis, the educational counselor can identify and understand the client's internal issues, including those they cannot articulate verbally, thereby facilitating healing and introspection [6].

The American art therapist Shaun McNiff views "healing creativity" as a process involving multiple stages, from the creation of images to subsequent reflection on them. McNiff describes a variety of working methods, including the exploration of images and participants' emotional reactions in groups, dialogues with the created images, artistic descriptions of them, visualization, and creative performances. This approach emphasizes the use of art as a medium for expression and introspection, helping participants explore their emotions and gain a deeper understanding of the connection between their creative imagination and emotional state. The methods proposed by McNiff are flexible and can be adapted to meet individual or group needs, aiming for personal development and emotional healing [apud 3].

Art therapy encompasses a wide range of approaches. Classical art therapy focuses exclusively on visual forms of creative expression, such as painting, graphic design, photography, drawing, and modeling. However, modern art therapy has evolved to include forms such as bibliotherapy, mask therapy, storytelling therapy, origami, drama therapy, music therapy, color therapy, video therapy, sand therapy, play therapy, and others. A recent example of a complex method is synthesis art therapy, which combines painting, poetry writing, dramaturgy, theater, rhetoric, and body expression. The number of these methods continues to grow.

The primary goal of the methods used in art therapy is to support the harmonious development of personality by stimulating self-expression and self-awareness. A central element in this process is the technique of active imagination, which facilitates direct dialogue between the conscious and unconscious. This dialogue helps reconcile the two dimensions of the psyche, promoting a healthy balance between them. The creative process becomes a mechanism for psychological correction, offering individuals the opportunity to explore new perspectives on reality, discover unknown aspects of themselves, and create an artistic product that reflects this introspection.

Art therapy can be applied either as a primary intervention method or as a complementary method combined with other psychotherapeutic techniques. A key aspect of art therapy is the symbolic reconstruction of conflictual situations. Through art, a traumatic or conflictual situation is recreated in a symbolic form, allowing the individual to restructure and resolve it using their creativity. Additionally, art therapy employs aesthetic reaction and catharsis to transform the emotional impact of a traumatic experience. This process shifts the nature of emotions from suffering to relief and pleasure, offering an opportunity to overcome trauma by expressing and processing negative emotions.

Art therapy techniques are used for a variety of issues, including psychological trauma, loss, crises, internal and interpersonal conflicts, post-traumatic, neurotic, or psychosomatic disorders, as well as existential and age-related crises. Furthermore, art therapy aids in developing creative thinking and personal integrity, providing

individuals with the opportunity to discover personal meanings through the creative process. The integration of art therapy into the educational counseling process offers a complementary and creative approach, essential for supporting clients, particularly children, in exploring and managing their emotions and challenges. In educational counseling, art therapy not only complements traditional intervention methods but also enriches them by providing symbolic and expressive means to articulate personal conflicts and needs. According to Iolanda Mitrofan (2008), the stages of the educational counseling process through art therapy include the following:

1. Establishing the psychological alliance. This initial stage involves creating a safe and trusting environment. The counselor explains the goals of counseling and the principles of confidentiality to both the parents and the child. When clients—especially children—feel uncomfortable expressing their emotions verbally, art therapy techniques such as drawing or modeling can be used to encourage openness and build trust. These methods allow the counselor to observe the child's emotional and relational dynamics, providing a foundation for subsequent interventions.

2. Active work and facilitating change. This stage involves using expressive techniques as a central tool in the counseling process. Children often struggle to express their emotions in words; therefore, methods such as drawing, storytelling, modeling, or play provide symbolic ways to project their inner experiences. The creative act allows children to transfer their anxieties and fears onto an external object (e.g., a canvas or clay figure), facilitating the exploration of these feelings in a controlled and less threatening manner.

Through artistic processes, repressed emotions can be released, providing a healthy outlet for processing tensions and reducing anxiety. For example, through drawing or storytelling, a child can symbolically recreate a conflictual situation, restructure it, and discover creative solutions to their problems. This contributes to the development of critical thinking and resilience. During this phase, the counselor takes an active role, guiding the creative process and helping the child recognize and reconcile repressed emotions. It is crucial to tailor the approach to the child's individual needs and limitations, avoiding pressure or direct confrontations.

3. Consolidating progress and ending counseling. The final stage focuses on integrating the progress made, ensuring that the child's newly developed skills—such as emotional regulation, creative expression, and self-regulation—are sustainable in everyday life. Art therapy supports this transition by strengthening self-esteem and interpersonal relationships, offering a safe space for the child to explore their creative potential. Collaboration with the family is also critical in this stage. Parents are encouraged to support the child's progress through creative activities at home, fostering a continued environment of growth and emotional expression [7, p. 230].

3. The use of art therapy methods in educational counseling

The students of the Pedagogical College within "Ion Creangă" Theoretical High School in Bălți are immersed in an educational environment that emphasizes their professional development as future educators. However, they face significant challenges related to adaptation and stress management. These difficulties underline the necessity of innovative and effective methods, such as art therapy, to support the

educational counseling process. This research aims to enhance educational counseling practices by integrating art therapy as a complementary method, offering a fresh perspective on how students can be guided to better manage their emotions and cultivate healthy interpersonal relationships. In this study, the counseling process is structured to foster self-expression, introspection, and personal growth among participants. The activities are carried out in two distinct stages, each playing a crucial role in facilitating emotional and behavioral transformation.

1. Non-verbal and creative stage: Symbolic expression

This initial stage serves as the foundation of the counseling process, emphasizing the spontaneous expression of emotions through artistic means. Students engage in activities such as: drawing and painting. These techniques enable students to project thoughts and emotions, which are difficult to articulate in words, onto a visual medium. The process aids in exploring the subconscious and externalizing internal conflicts. The objectives of this stage include:

- ✓ Creating a safe space for emotional expression.
- ✓ Reducing internal tensions through emotional release.
- ✓ Providing a non-intrusive approach to addressing personal issues.

2. Verbal and reflective stage: Understanding and integration

Following the creative expression, the counselor initiates discussions with the students about their creations. This stage is essential for transforming creative experiences into valuable insights for self-awareness and personal development. The process involves: Interpretation of symbols: Students are encouraged to reflect on the visual elements in their creations. The counselor assists them in exploring the hidden meanings behind the symbols and connecting these to their emotions and experiences. Personal connections: Students are guided to relate their artistic creations to real-life situations. This helps them identify emotional and behavioral patterns that may influence their relationships with others. The objectives of this stage are:

- ✓ Developing a new perspective on personal challenges.
- ✓ Gaining awareness of emotional and behavioral patterns.
- ✓ Creating an actionable plan to manage difficulties.

In the following sections, we will explore some of the most commonly used art therapy techniques in educational counseling sessions. These techniques will be explained in terms of their application and impact, demonstrating how art therapy enriches the counseling process by addressing emotional challenges through creative and symbolic expression.

Technique: "My Personal Garden"

This technique was adapted for the students of the Pedagogical College at "Ion Creangă" Theoretical High School and uses the metaphor of a garden to stimulate self-exploration and personal development. The garden becomes a symbol of one's inner life, resources, and natural processes, providing a safe framework for introspection and creative expression. The objective is to help students explore and become aware of aspects related to their emotional state, personal resources, and their relationship with themselves and the surrounding environment.

Phase 1: Creating the garden (Symbolic expression). Students are invited to create an image of a garden on paper using materials such as colored pencils, watercolors,

or collages. The theme can be personalized, for instance: "The garden of my life"; "The garden of my dreams"; "The garden of my youth". Students are encouraged to add details reflecting their inner state, such as: flowers, trees, pathways, rivers, or other natural elements. Symbolic objects representing their resources, aspirations, or challenges. During the creation process, the counselor provides support without intervening in the creative process.

Phase 2: Reflecting on the garden (Exploration and introspection). After completing the drawing, the counselor initiates a discussion with the students, using questions designed to facilitate introspection, such as: "How do you feel when looking at this garden?"; "What does this garden symbolize for you?"; "Is the garden well-maintained or neglected? Why?"; "Who is the gardener of this garden – is it you or someone else?"; "What activities are taking place in your garden? Is there something you would like to add?"; Students reflect on how their garden symbolizes aspects of their personality or life, such as their current emotional states, relationship with themselves and others, and their unutilized resources or desires.

Phase 3: Integrating the experience (Writing and storytelling). Following the discussion, students are invited to write a short story about "My Personal Garden," describing how the garden was created, what happens in it, and what changes they would like to make to better reflect their desires and needs. Students can explore how their garden serves as a metaphor for their lives, identifying positive aspects and challenges they face.

Phase 4: Sensory exploration (Imaginary walk). Students are guided on an "imaginary walk" through their garden. This activity involves closing their eyes and imagining a journey through the garden, exploring in detail what they see, the sounds they hear, and the emotions or sensations they experience as they approach different objects in the garden. Students are encouraged to share the emotions and thoughts that arise during this exploration.

Phase 5: Creating a symbolic object (Talismans for protection). At the end, students create an object symbolizing the protection or resources of their garden. This could be an additional drawing, a simple sculpture, or a collage. The object becomes a personal "talisman," reminding them of their inner resources and the support they can access.

This activity helps students identify their emotional states and internal needs. It stimulates creativity and introspection, promotes emotional self-regulation, and fosters a positive perspective on their lives. Integrated into educational counseling, the "My personal garden" technique provides a safe and creative space for students, supporting them in developing emotional management and relational skills [5, p. 67].

Technique: "Working with masks"

General description: Masks serve as a symbolic representation of how individuals present themselves to the world, an archetype of the "Persona" described in psychology. In educational counseling, the "working with masks" technique can help students explore social roles, repressed emotions, and their authenticity. Masks can represent adaptation and protection mechanisms but may sometimes act as barriers to personal development. Through this technique, students can become aware of the masks they wear, what they signify, and how they influence behavior

and relationships. The objectives for the activity aims to explore personal identity, the relationship between outward appearance and the authentic self, identify the social roles assumed by students, enhance authenticity and self-awareness, and develop adaptability and emotional regulation skills. Activity stages:

1. Creating the Masks: Symbolic expression. Students are invited to create masks reflecting different aspects of their personality or roles they play in daily life. Materials can include paper, cardboard, plastic, clay, plaster, modeling paste, colored pencils, watercolors, or other artistic supplies. Possible themes for masks might include: "My favorite masks"; "The masks I don't want anyone to see"; "The masks that protect me"; "Who am I without a mask?" Students can create multiple masks, each symbolizing an emotional state, a sub-personality, or a role they play in their relationships.

2. Reflecting on the masks: Awareness of identity. After completing their masks, the counselor facilitates a guided discussion, asking questions such as: "What does this mask symbolize for you?"; "When do you wear this mask in your daily life?"; "What do you like or dislike about this mask?"; "Is this mask an authentic part of you or a role you play?". Students can also explore the connections between their masks and situations where they feel the need to protect themselves or hide their true identity.

3. Mask-based games and activities: Dynamic expression. Students participate in interactive activities with their masks, such as: Dialogues between masks, where each student gives voice to their mask and imagines a conversation with another mask or their authentic self. Non-verbal expressions, where students act out scenarios while wearing their masks, expressing emotions through gestures and movements. Exploring shadows, creating a mask that represents the hidden or repressed parts of their personality.

4. Integration and final reflection. Students reflect on their experience working with masks, answering questions such as: "What did I learn about myself through this activity?"; "How do these masks help me better understand who I am?"; "What aspects of myself would I like to improve or show more openly to others?" Students may keep their masks as symbols of their self-discovery journey or modify them later to reflect personal changes.

The "working with masks" technique supports students in exploring their identities, understanding the roles they play, and developing a more authentic perspective of themselves. By discovering and accepting the various facets of their personality, students can build self-confidence, improve their ability to relate to others, and enhance their adaptability to different situations. This activity integrates seamlessly into educational counseling, providing a creative and safe space for introspection and personal development [4].

Technique: Creative writing "My story about here and now"

This bibliotherapy-based technique focuses on using creative writing to help students express their emotions, reflect on personal experiences, and develop a deeper connection with the present moment. Creative writing, inspired by elements of nature and daily life, provides students with the opportunity to symbolically explore their inner states, better understand their feelings, and find solutions to personal challenges in a safe and creative way. The objectives of this technique

include: 1) Developing emotional awareness through creative expression; 2) Promoting a state of "here and now" through writing inspired by the present moment; 3) Facilitating the exploration and integration of emotions in a non-intrusive manner; 4) Improving reflection and introspection skills; 5) Enhancing creativity and aesthetic sensitivity. Steps of the Technique:

1. Introduction and connecting to the present moment. The counselor begins the session with a brief introduction about the connection between nature, emotions, and the present moment. Students are invited to observe their surroundings (e.g., a garden, a window, or even an imagined natural landscape). This process helps reduce tension and fosters a connection with the "here and now." Introductory exercise: Each student is asked to silently describe a natural element that captures their attention (e.g., a falling leaf, sunlight streaming through a window, or a gentle breeze).

2. Creative writing: "My story about here and now". Students are guided to write a short story or poem inspired by the present moment. This could include observations about nature or their own emotional states, an imaginative story about a character living in that landscape, or expressions of feelings tied to what they see, feel, or hear at that moment. Suggestions for writing:

1) Write three sentences about what you see around you right now; 2) Imagine this place as a character. What would it say about you? What would it do?; 3) Write about how you feel in this moment using metaphors from nature (e.g., "I feel like a leaf floating in the air").

3. Sharing and reflection. After writing, students may share excerpts from their creations if they feel comfortable. The counselor helps students reflect on their texts through questions such as: "What emotions did you feel while writing?"; "What does this story or poem symbolize for you?"; "How does this text relate to your real life?" Students who do not wish to share can discuss the significance of their creations privately with the counselor.

4. Integration and conclusion. At the end of the activity, the counselor encourages students to identify a key message they discovered through their writing. Each student can write this message on a piece of paper and keep it as an "anchor" for the future [4].

This technique helps students explore their emotions and connect with their inner selves in the context of the present moment. By fostering creativity, introspection, and emotional awareness, it provides a meaningful and therapeutic approach to self-expression within educational counseling.

4. Conclusions

Art therapy represents an innovative method of educational counseling based on creative expression, enabling students to explore, experience, and express emotions symbolically. This method is increasingly recognized as a progressive psychological support tool, contributing to the development of a healthy and creative personality. Additionally, art therapy supports the socialization and integration of students through essential functions such as adaptive, corrective, mobilizing, regulatory, rehabilitative, and preventive roles. A key feature of art therapy is its use of non-verbal communication as a means of expression, making it

highly effective for students who struggle to articulate their emotions or problems verbally. Currently, this method continues to evolve rapidly, adapting to the needs of students and the changes in the contemporary social environment.

The benefits of art therapy in the educational counseling of students at the "Ion Creangă" Pedagogical College have been multiple and significant. Students have learned to recognize their difficulties and explore effective solutions for resolving them, enhancing their self-awareness and problem-solving capacities. Through this method, students developed a positive attitude, fostering an optimistic perspective on themselves and their surrounding world. Furthermore, art therapy contributed to improving their decision-making skills, equipping them with essential competencies for managing challenging or stressful situations.

Students also learned adaptive ways to respond to stressful contexts, significantly reducing maladaptive behaviors and enabling them to develop more effective and balanced reactions. Thus, art therapy has proven to be a valuable tool in supporting the personal and educational development of students. These benefits have a direct impact on the personal and academic growth of students, providing them with the resources needed to successfully address social, emotional, and educational challenges. Integrating art therapy into educational counseling contributes to shaping emotionally balanced students who are better equipped to manage stress and develop healthy relationships with those around them.

References

1. Dimitriu-Tiron, E., *Educational Counseling*. Iași: European Institute Publishing House, 2005, ISBN 973-611-336-1
2. Dumitru, Ion Al. *Psychopedagogical Counseling: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Suggestions*. 2nd ed., rev. Iași: Polirom, 2008, ISBN 978-973-46-0869-0
3. Kiseleva, M. V. *Art Therapy in Practical Psychology and Social Work*. St. Petersburg: Rech, 2007. ISBN 5-9268-0637-2
4. Koloshina, T. Yu., Trus, A. A., *Art-Therapeutic Techniques in Training: Characteristics and Use. A Practical Guide for Trainers*. St. Petersburg: Rech, 2010, ISBN 978-5-9268-0831-6
5. Kopytin, A. I., Kort, B., *Body-Oriented Art Therapy Techniques*. Moscow: Psychotherapy, 2011, ISBN 978-5-903182-86-2
6. Kosarevskaya, T. E., *Art Methods in Psychological Counseling: Methodological Recommendations*. Edited by R.R. Kutkina. Vitebsk: Vitebsk State University named after P.M. Masherov, 2020, Part 1, 49 pages
7. Mitrofan, I. *Psychotherapy: (Theoretical, Methodological, and Practical Guidelines)*. Bucharest: SPER Publishing House, 2008. ISBN 978-973-8383-38-8
8. Permyakova, M. E. *Expressive Therapy in the Work of a Psychologist*. Yekaterinburg: Ural University Publishing House, 2016. ISBN 978-5-7996-1683-0