

Art Therapy in ECI

Art therapy is a healing process that uses art as a means of treatment. For its positive effects on health, an increasing number of professionals (psychotherapists, psychiatrists, psychologists, therapeutic and special educators) use art therapy in their practice. Art therapy does not necessarily have to be focused on problems of individuals. It can serve as a tool of self-exploration and personal growth. The term art therapy stands for healing through art. Sometimes it is used as an umbrella term for art in general including music, dance, drama, literature and fine arts. It is common to define art therapy as healing through visual arts, fine art means.

Children have always been expressing their inner worlds through art. Emotions, desires, relation to their environment and to spiritual values are shown in children's art work. Already People in pre-historical periods already discovered the power and meaning of arts for the human life in their cave paintings. The art has become a part of human personality. It allows people to communicate with their surroundings, uncover their experience, integrate their personality, and express their opinions.

In art therapy, cathartic and therapeutic effect of the art is utilized. Art therapists were the first professionals to refer to the potential usage of arts in the treatment of mental disorders. In the 20th century, with the development of psychotherapy, art therapy started to be used as a treatment method, which has a positive influence on people's psyche, their relationships with their environment and it allows them to restore the lost balance.

Creative art activities themselves bear a therapeutic potential. Within psychotherapy, it is possible to strengthen it with further psychotherapeutic processing of the lived experience. Artistic expression in therapy may serve as a means that opens a way for people towards themselves and towards their environment. In early childhood intervention, art therapy provides a means of building expression and communication bridges between children and therapists. At the same time, the therapists are provided with a tangible language of the created art products that facilitate their communication with the parents.

Art expression is natural especially in childhood. Children grasp the outer reality through drawings. They learn to communicate with their surroundings. That is the reason for using art therapy in early childhood intervention and therapeutic educational rehabilitation. It has its meaning especially in the treatment of attention disorders, behavior disorders, emotional deprivation, dealing with trauma, or family issues.

The main goal of art therapy is to therapeutically influence personality, inner integrity and to mediate contact with social environment and with oneself through artistic means. Individual goals of art therapy regarding personality of children are: expression of emotions, feelings, conflicts; self-expression, self-esteem; building self-confidence, autonomy; developing creativity, fantasy; activation, motivation; and relaxation. Social or group goals are based on the relationship of individuals to their social environment. They relate to fulfilling social needs, such as: communication and cooperation, appreciation and support, tolerance and empathy, sharing and problem solving, and developing social relationships. In the context of early intervention it is useful to employ individual form of art therapy especially when a risk of bullying, abuse, neglect or alcoholism in the family has been observed. In these cases, children are usually not able to talk about their problems in a group. They experience intensive feelings of fear and shame. Art expression of children provides information about their intellectual development, gross and fine motor skills, their relationships to the surroundings, as well as their family background. Hyperactivity, aggression, low self-esteem, mental disorders, experienced traumas can be discovered through children's art expression (Šiserová, 2013). It mirrors their inner world, present feelings, sadness and unconscious conflicts, but also joy and improvements in development. In children's drawings we focus on observing: a) the usage of space – fully used space of paper is considered a sign of mental wellbeing, balance and self-confidence of children; b) the line – aggressive and impulsive children use thick lines with a strong pressure, anxious children, with low self-esteem or depression use light interrupted lines; c) the age appropriateness – contents and formal quality, e.g. details, perspective – regress in drawing may be a sign of a presently experienced conflict, deprivation or trauma; d) the topic and contents – borders, wars, catastrophes as well as strange details or missing body parts may be a signal of a developmental risk; e) repeated correcting of the drawing may be explained as uncertainty or over-criticism; f) the usage of colors relates to the inner experiences of children.

Developmentally oriented drama therapy

The basis of developmentally oriented drama therapy is creating the broadest possible spectrum of opportunities for play and play activity in optimal development of children from birth. Play activities are adjusted to the mental level, or developmental stage of children taking into consideration disability. The space for constructing early childhood intervention realized through dramatic expression was created from a fusion of knowledge from theory of psychosocial personality development according to Erikson (1997) together with findings of Courtney (1980) and Jennings (1995), authors of developmental model of drama. In this space, play is assigned with an important status of (re)construction of optimal development of children (Kováčová, 2011).

Puppet therapy

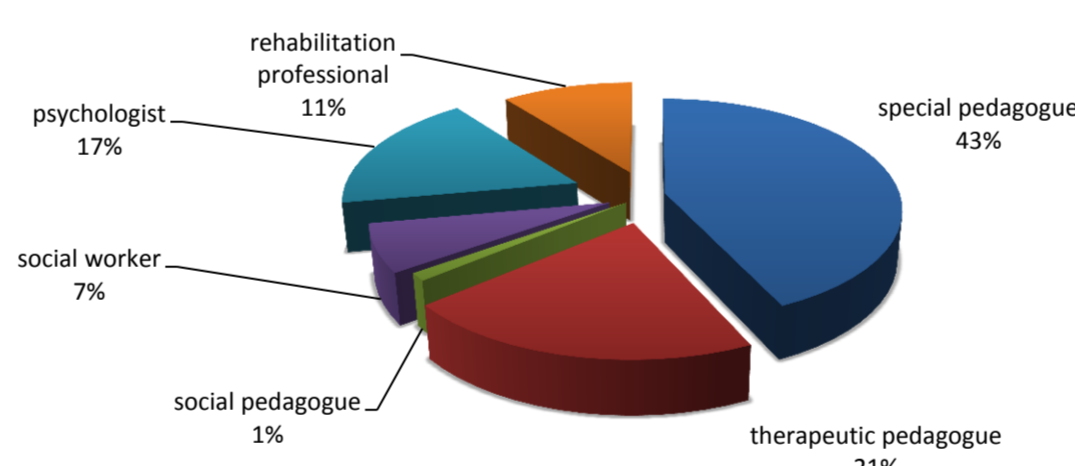
In the therapeutic process, each participant, regardless of age, or health status, is provided with an opportunity to be a part of a (therapeutic) puppet action. Realization may take place through **direct individual activity with a puppet**, with the opportunity to express thoughts and emotions, conflict(s), "wounds"; or through a **group activity** with puppets within therapeutic puppet performance, which has an effect of catharsis and relaxation. In some situations, embodied rendering of an issue through an action with a puppet helps clients in expression. Denying communication may have different reasons. It is the role of the therapist to correctly interpret the symbolism of puppets used.



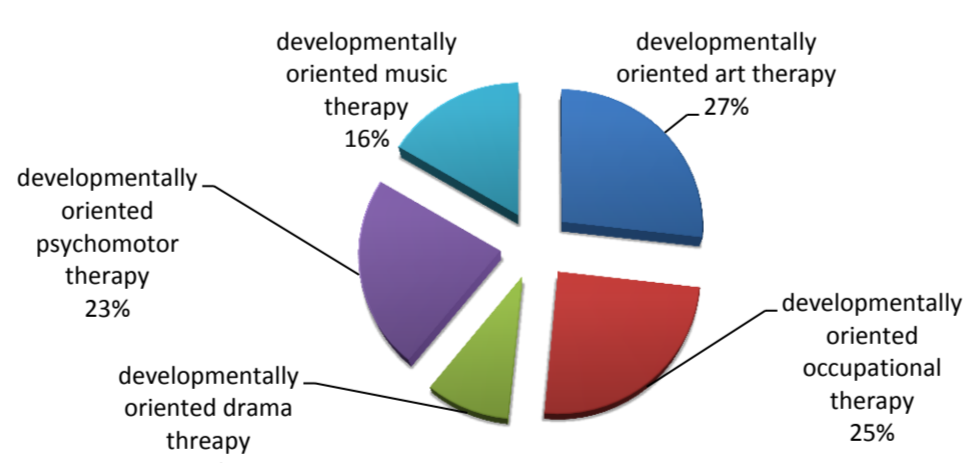
Early Childhood Intervention in Slovakia

Therapeutic concepts of help are most commonly used by special pedagogues (43%) and therapeutic pedagogues (21%). The difference in the percentage is quite high, but it is necessary to point out the fact that there is a currently persisting imbalance in staff employment to detriment therapeutic pedagogues.

Providing early intervention in the context of team cooperation in centres of psychological-pedagogical and special-educational counselling (data from 25.11.2012, source: Kováčová, 2012)



Most commonly used therapeutic concepts of help in institutions (data from 25.11.2012, source: Kováčová, 2012)



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Principles of ECI

ECI represents an area of multidisciplinary cooperation. Reaching optimal development of children is based on conditions of effective early childhood intervention that include:

- **Regularity and consistency** in finishing tasks and supporting children in persistence of task fulfillment – *I am successful, I managed it* (creating a goal that is reachable). Therapist/Therapeutic pedagogue tries to solve and manage deficiencies of children, especially in cooperation with families within effective functioning in the family and also in interaction with social environment.
- **Overcoming barriers and limits** (despite stimulation and support, a specific area stays limited). It means overcoming obstacles that represent developmental limits in the children's development in the beginning. However, through gradual maturation and early intervention, opportunities for adaptation and managing the activities or tasks are created.
- **Providing sufficient stimuli** within developmentally oriented concepts of help.
- Achieving the highest possible degree of **independence and integrity** of clients in the context of their quality of life.

Approaches and methods of therapeutic education include focus on offering actual stimuli, strengthening self-competence, social grounding, organization of educational influences, requirement and experiences, supporting creativity, activity and positive life perspectives.

Bibliotherapy in ECI

Bibliotherapy is defined as purposeful, systematic, and goal oriented therapeutic educational activity. The effects of using literature expression are focused on improvement of current state of wellbeing, which supports objective improvement of health in general.

Bibliotherapy as a method with a communicative character, has enhancing effect on verbal expression of clients. It can serve as an interaction factor, stimulator of emotional, ethical and social development.

The goal of expressive therapies for children with disadvantages is to develop all areas and parts of personality, to offer appropriate environment and conditions for exploiting their interests and abilities. Working with literary text with children with disadvantages is an important means of social communication and to a certain extent, it saturates the need of social contact with the majority of intact persons.

Through expressive art therapies people gain experiences from various parts of life, feeling of success, self-realization, emotional relaxation, and motivation towards further activities. Janczak (2004) wrote that the therapeutic effect of reading in children with disadvantages especially lies not only in a total relaxation, expressing and decoding the problem, but also in bringing positive role models, and mobilization of mental strengths. Children living in difficult life conditions need especially sensitive approach. Self-expression might be an issue, these children are often tense and easily hurt.

It is important to establish contact between children and the therapist, also to have a wide range of activities prepared. It is useful to switch dynamic and relaxation activities. Setting rules together with the children contributes to their motivation. In the beginning, structured activities are more successful.

Play Therapy in ECI

Natural free play in education and therapy is one of the most important and basic resources in play therapy. To understand basic therapeutic principles of play therapy, it is needed to know the possibilities of play with all its principles – mainly in the context of development. Play itself is therapeutic. In quality, deep, respectful and accepting relationship in play therapy, therapeutic aspects are multiplied. Play has a prevention aspect, it helps to handle troubles of life and in case of complicated problems, it is used in therapy (Mitašíková, 2013).

Natural free play is a result of a choice of freedom, interactive communication, creative process, active engagement and voluntary participation. Natural free play is a neutral, instinctive need to create and thus recreate oneself. It is an expression of a deep tendency of a person towards self-development. In no other activity, children have so much freedom necessary for life, as they have in play. The situation of play also sets natural limits, within which children have freedom to act, but also a necessity to take responsibility for impacts of their actions. Children that are allowed to play naturally and freely, follow their own impulses in play and according to that adjust the form and contents of play. Their play exactly copies the developmental level and the actual needs that need to be fulfilled. According to Řičan, Krejčířová et al. (1997) play is a means of expression and a need. Emotional wellbeing, excitement and enthusiasm that accompany play decrease inner tension in children. Play is an important factor in development and also a diagnostic criterion of development stages. It is a means of discovering the world. Play provides children with wide options for cognition and skill training and it is important in social learning too.

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