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## ART THERAPY IN PREVENTING SOCIAL EXCLUSION ACCORDING TO STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

### ARTETERAPIA W ZAPOBIEGANIU WYKLUCZENIU SPOŁECZNEMU W OPINII UCZNIÓW I NAUCZYCIELI

#### **Keywords:**


art therapy,  
psychological and  
pedagogical support,  
prophylaxis

**Summary:** One of the important tasks of a modern school is to provide psychological and pedagogical assistance to students who experience difficulties. A wide range of dysfunctional behaviors hindering relationships with others may lead to social exclusion of adolescents. An important solution could be the application of art-therapy-based methods in the work with such students, making use of the therapeutic qualities of particular fields of art in the process of influencing their personality and emotional sphere. In the study presented herein, an attempt was made to determine the place of art therapy in solving the problems of teenagers in the opinion of the participants of art therapy classes and their teachers.

#### **Słowa kluczowe:**

arteterapia, pomoc  
psychologiczno-  
pedagogiczna,  
profilaktyka

**Streszczenie:** Jednym z istotnych zadań współczesnej szkoły jest zapewnienie pomocy psychologiczno-pedagogicznej uczniom przejawiającym problemy. Duża rozpiętość zachowań dysfunkcyjnych utrudniających relacje z innymi może w konsekwencji prowadzić do wykluczenia społecznego dorastających. Istotnym rozwiązaniem wydaje się zastosowanie w pracy z uczniami



metod opartych na arteterapii, wykorzystujących terapeutyczne walory poszczególnych dziedzin sztuki w procesie oddziaływania na osobowość i sferę emocjonalną nastolatków. W zaprezentowanych badaniach podjęto próbę ustalenia miejsca arteterapii w rozwiązywaniu problemów nastolatków – w opinii uczestników zajęć arteterapeutycznych i ich nauczycieli.

## Introduction

The job of a modern school is not limited to the transfer of knowledge to its students. A particularly important area is the organization of psychological and pedagogical assistance in accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 9 August 2017 on the principles of the organization and provision of psychological and pedagogical assistance in public nursery schools, schools and educational organizations (Journal of Laws, Item 1591), which imposes on teachers, among others, the obligation to provide professional expertise to students showing symptoms of a risk of social maladjustment affected by a crisis, traumatic situation, neglect, dangerous environment or manifesting difficulties in adaptation (§ 2.2).

Adolescents experiencing personal difficulties and inadequately performing assigned social roles are more often exposed to difficulties in peer relations and exclusion. Students with behavioral or emotional problems during adolescence are particularly affected by identity crises and experience difficulties with self-esteem and adequate self-appraisal. The problems indicated usually require the organization of specialized classes geared towards developing emotional and social competences (§ 6).

Working with students manifesting dysfunctional behaviors poses a specific challenge and often requires exceptional pedagogical inventiveness. The violation of social norms and rules, lack of respect for the rights of others, aggression, violence and problems related to addictions often overlap with teenagers' problems arising from a sense of the lack of understanding resulting from intergenerational differences and rapid socio-cultural changes, and may additionally hinder proper functioning in the environment. Often, professional activities in the field of psychological and pedagogical assistance are the only

chance to protect these students from permanent conflicts, peer rejection and exclusion from the social group.

B. Skwarek and W. Szulc emphasize that the wide range of disorders in the behavior of children and adolescents, which is now being revealed, make the application of art therapy important, “not only as a therapy, but also as a method of personal development” (2017, p. 97).

Art therapy in literature on the subject (Marcinkowska, 2013, p. 17) is often referred to interchangeably with the term therapy through art. Both names refer to activity through art, but there is a certain difference between them. In the first case (art therapy), there is the relation: subject/therapeutic group–therapist. In the second case (therapy through art), the subject of the interactions plays the role of a therapist at the same time. It should be noted that both situations can occur in art therapy as well as in therapy through art. Art, stresses A. Linek, “is an attempt to find the sense and purpose of life on the path of one’s own development. With its help we tame anxiety, fear or stress. A wide range of artistic techniques allows us to locate the problem, name it, understand and overcome it” (2012, p. 88). According to A. Wojciechowski (2007), therapy – understood as care, treatment or nursing – is both creativity and art, as well as participation in culture. Art therapy is a method of comprehensive therapeutic influence which is important for the development or correction of both the psychological and physical sphere of the subjects of interactions. A. Papaj emphasizes that it manifests itself in practically every field of art: painting, dance, music, theater, film, photography or literature (2010, p. 262).

In general, art therapy is treated only as therapy using various art techniques. In a broader sense, art therapy refers to many areas and includes music therapy, choreotherapy, bibliotherapy, as well as therapies where visual arts, theater and film are applied. E. Konieczna (2007), when classifying art therapy in its broadest sense, distinguishes art therapy, bibliotherapy, choreotherapy, chromotherapy, drama therapy, aesthetic therapy, ergotherapy, horticultural therapy, activity-based therapy, music therapy and poetry therapy. Art therapy can be applied in different environments – regardless of the level of physical, mental and social functioning – and among various age groups. It is also perfect for working with people with deficits and problems in social functioning by introducing the idea of using art with the participation of learning through social, instrumental and targeted conditionality. The therapeutic functions of expression help one to relax, overcome a lack of belief in oneself and overcome

complexes. It is worth noting that the use of forms of art therapy facilitates the expression of conflicting, difficult and traumatic content and helps in finding ways to overcome them.

The goals that guide the therapeutic work determine the realized functions of art therapy. In the literature on the subject, the leading functions of art therapy indicated by M. Kulczycki are mentioned and include: recreational (providing appropriate conditions for rest and separation from problems), educational (expanding knowledge about oneself and the surrounding reality) and corrective (re-modeling harmful mechanisms of functioning into beneficial and valuable ones). The above functions of art therapy have been extended by E. Konieczna to include the expressive function (revealing suppressed emotions and helping to relieve tension), compensatory (satisfying depressed needs), cognitive (in terms of naming and expressing feelings) and regulatory (enabling self-fulfillment and self-acceptance) function (Linek, 2012, p. 92).

A. Korbut indicates that there is now a growing interest in art therapy (2016, p. 278). The author emphasizes that art therapy activities undertaken among students contribute to compensating for deficiencies or limitations in the psychophysical dimension, therefore they are recommended for children with various deficits. Art therapy techniques are also successful in endangered environments.

The catalogue of problems that art therapy methods are used to overcome is extensive. Among the most frequently indicated premises for the use of art therapy in work with adolescent youth, M. Stańko (2009) mentions disturbances in social relations, oppositional and defiant disorders, family problems (domestic violence, sex abuse, divorce or death in the family), school phobias, specific disorders in the development of school skills and psychological consequences of chronic somatic diseases.

The desirable effects of the use of art in preventive work are confirmed, among others, by the studies by M.G. Khadar, J. Babapour and H. Sabourimoghaddam (2013) on the influence of art therapy on the reduction of symptoms of disobedience in boys attending primary school. After 12 sessions with the use of painting therapy, the participants were more inclined to share their feelings, and their communication skills improved.

British studies (Cortina & Fazel, 2015) show the role of using art therapy methods in targeted intervention aimed at students with emotional and behavioral problems at risk of "falling out of the education system." A reduction of emotional problems, problems with behavior and peer relations, and

improvement of mood and functioning in the emotional and social spheres were observed in adolescents covered by the program.

Results of research conducted by H.A. Bejger in a socialization institution showed that the use of art therapy in educational work contributed to the improvement of the mental condition of the pupils, “which manifested itself in an improved mood and better well-being, the development of interests, faith in their abilities, improved relations with the educators and increased ability to deal with anger and aggression” (2018, p. 87). In the light of the above considerations, art therapy is a recognized method of working with teenagers in need of help and support because of their personal problems and difficulties in social functioning. It also turns out to be a significant way of satisfying individual needs and supporting the development potential of students in various forms of psychological and pedagogical support organized by teachers and educators.

### **Assumptions of the methodology of own research**

Recognizing the importance of art therapy in pedagogical activities, especially in the field of solving the problems of teenagers which may indirectly lead to social exclusion, the subject of the study was determined to be the prophylactic effects of art therapy at school.

The aim of the study was to outline the place of art therapy in work with adolescents manifesting educational problems in the opinion of the students participating in the classes using art therapy methods and their teachers.

The research was looking for an answer to the question: What is the function of art therapy methods in working with students with educational problems?

The research was conducted in the school years 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 in the Łódź Province in randomly selected schools and junior high schools in which psychological and pedagogical support was provided for students with educational problems in the form of psycho-educational and socio-therapeutic activities using methods of art therapy. The participants of the study included 100 students of lower secondary school (ages 15–17) who qualified to participate in socio-therapeutic and psycho-educational classes and 63 randomly selected teachers teaching the examined teenagers. The diagnostic survey method in the form of a questionnaire was used in the study. Both students and teachers anonymously filled in the questionnaires containing closed and semi-open questions.

## Value of art therapy classes in the pupils' perception

The effective implementation of tasks faced by educators is not only the efficient use of knowledge and competent use of skills, it is also involves accurate identification of the real needs of the subjects and awareness of the importance of experiences accompanying the participants of classes of a preventive and therapeutic nature. Proposing activities based on the assumptions of art therapy to students is also connected with the need to be open to their new – often differing from the established patterns – behaviors and reactions. The role of the person conducting classes is to ensure the quality of communication and a favorable working atmosphere.

Therefore, it seems important to establish what the participating students think about the classes during which forms of art therapy are used.

Table 1  
*The advantages of art therapy in the opinion of students*

Item no.	CATEGORY OF REPLY	L	%
1.	Nice atmosphere	82	82%
2.	New experiences	73	73%
3.	Possibility of creative activity	60	60%
4.	Good fun	56	56%
5.	Relaxation	56	56%
6.	Friendly leader	52	52%
7.	In the group there are peers who like what I like	47	47%
8.	I can tell you what I think	45	45%
9.	Possibility of success	39	39%
10.	I am learning something new	20	20%

N = 100

Source: own research.

Students see a number of advantages in art therapy classes (Table 1). First of all, a pleasant atmosphere and the possibility of gaining new experiences make this an attractive form. For more than half of the respondents, these are activities that help to relieve tension and stress; it can be assumed that thanks

to the kindness of the teacher, this is a chance for good fun and relaxation for students experiencing unpleasant situations in school life. Therefore, it is worth exploring the issue and establishing how the students feel about themselves during classes with a schoolteacher who uses art therapy in socio-therapeutic or psycho-educational classes (Table 2).

Table 2

*Pupils' responses regarding their own wellbeing in classes assisted by art therapy*

Item no.	CATEGORY OF REPLY	L	%
1.	I am happy	63	63%
2.	I forget about my problems	54	54%
3.	I am curious what will happen...	50	50%
4.	I am active	47	47%
5.	I am calm	45	45%
6.	I enjoy the presence of others	45	45%
7.	I can feel that others accept me	39	39%
8.	I am relaxed	35	35%

N = 100

Source: own research.

It turns out that the use of art therapy in preventive work brings the desired results – at least this is what the surveyed students' statements in Table 2 show. Apart from the values associated with well-being (joy, distance from difficult situations associated with problems and peace), there are issues important for shaping pro-social attitudes of teenagers (45% of participants indicated the response – “I am happy with the presence of others”) and strengthening their self-esteem (39% chose “I feel that others accept me”).

To sum it up, it can be concluded that the use of art therapy in work with youth contributes to equipping adolescents with new desirable individual and social competences. Moreover, the influence of art helps to shape desirable interpersonal behaviors and encourages self-reflection, which, in turn, translates into more efficient functioning in the assigned social roles. Being in touch with art helps students to forget about problems and provides solutions that can be helpful in various life situations.

Students also see specific benefits from participating in the classes, as summarized in Table 3. In the opinion of adolescents, one of the main advantages of classes conducted with the use of art therapy is that they strengthen self-esteem – they give them faith in their abilities and mobilize them to self-knowledge. Apart from helping the students to recognize emotional and affective states – their own (60%) and those of others (40%), important advantages of the classes also include shaping constructive interpersonal relations (relations with others – 53%; cooperation skills – 38%).

Table 3  
*Benefits of participating in classes with the use of art therapy in the perception of participants*

Item no.	CATEGORY OF REPLY	L	%
1.	They awaken faith in my abilities	70	70%
2.	Influence on getting to know yourself better	68	68%
3.	They help to better understand and control one's own emotional reactions	60	60%
4.	They improve relations with others	53	53%
5.	Encourage to make an effort	52	52%
6.	They develop my interests	42	42%
7.	Sensitize to the experiences and emotions of others.	40	40%
8.	They teach cooperation	38	38%

N = 100

Source: own research.

The analysis of students' opinions concerning the value of classes with the use of art therapy techniques (Table 1), their well-being during these classes (Table 2) and the benefits of these classes (Table 3) allow us to indicate the importance of particular functions of art therapy in the opinion of teenagers. It should be stressed that all the functions of art therapy were performed during the activities with the young people.

Participants most often point to the advantages associated with the recreational function of art therapy – a pleasant atmosphere during classes, good fun, relaxation, lessening of tension, a kind leader, forgetting about problems (from 82% to 35% of participants indicated these advantages), its educational function – new experiences, better knowledge of oneself and encouragement



to undertake effort (from 73% to 52%), and its regulatory function – the ability to express themselves, achieve success and express themselves (from 70% to 42% of indications).

Over half of adolescents emphasize the importance of the corrective function – the possibility of creative action and improvement of relations with others (from 60% to 38% of participants) and the expressive function – better understanding of their own emotional reactions (60%).

The participants the least often identified benefits resulting from the implementation of the compensatory function – the possibility of activity, being in the presence of others, accepting people with similar needs (from 47% to 39% of participants) and the cognitive function – sensitization to the experiences and emotions of others (40%).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the prophylactic approach of including art therapy works well with students and brings satisfactory results for pedagogical activity.

### The role of art therapy in the opinion of teachers

The research conducted also looked at what the teachers think about the use of art therapy methods in their work with students who manifest problems. At the beginning, it was necessary to determine in which situations, according to the respondents, it is worth using methods of art therapy.

Table 4  
*Indications for art therapy work with students showing problems in the opinion of teachers*

Item no.	THE TYPE OF PROBLEMS	L	%
1.	Failures at school	15	24%
2.	A reluctance to learn	15	24%
3.	Truancy	10	16%
4.	Disturbances in social relations	40	63%
5.	School phobias	45	71%
6.	Incorrect interpersonal communication	32	51%
7.	Conflictual tendencies	35	56%
8.	Aggression and violence	48	76%
9.	Danger of addiction	55	87%

Item no.	THE TYPE OF PROBLEMS	L	%
10.	Experiments with legal highs	55	87%
11.	Emotional problems	63	100%
12.	Depression and anxiety disorders	63	100%
13.	Stress	63	100%
14.	Shyness	60	95%
15.	Low self-esteem	63	100%
16.	Family problems	60	95%

N = 63

Source: own research.

It should be emphasized that the categories of problems the interviewed teachers thought could be overcome with the use of art therapy (Table 4) are included in the catalogue of behaviors predisposing adolescents to be included in specialized classes with the use of art therapy.

All the interviewed teachers saw emotional problems, disturbances in social relations, depression and anxiety, stress and low self-esteem as indications for the participation of students in art therapy classes. The majority of respondents (over 75%) do not believe in the effectiveness of solving teenagers' school problems by using art therapy methods in their work with them, and every second respondent does not associate the application of these methods with the improvement of interpersonal relations. Teachers also underestimate the importance of art therapy techniques in working with problems of aggression, violence and addictions.

Analysis of data allows us to assume that most teachers identify art therapy methods with psychotherapeutic work. They less often see art therapy's importance in overcoming student problems of a behavioral or didactic nature.

Teachers were also asked about the tasks which, in their opinion, are fulfilled by art therapy classes (Table 5). It turned out that all respondents saw the role of art therapy in its recreational and expressive functions. They least appreciated its role in shaping positive, valuable contacts with others (56%). It is worth stressing that a similar opinion was expressed in this respect by the participants of the classes – 53% of them stated that the skills acquired during the classes improve their relations with others, 38% believed that they teach cooperation (see Table 3).

Table 5  
*Art therapy functions according to teachers*

Item no.	FUNCTION	L	%
1.	Recreational – relieving stress and tension	63	100%
2.	Educational – recognizing needs, broadening knowledge about oneself	42	67%
3.	Corrective – improving relations with others	35	56%
4.	Expressive – revealing emotional and affective states	63	100%
5.	Compensatory – meeting needs	45	71%
6.	Cognitive – naming and expressing emotional and affective states	50	79%
7.	Regulatory – self-fulfillment and self-acceptance	39	62%

N = 63

Source: own research.

## Summary and conclusions

A comparison of the importance given to the different functions of art therapy shows the differences in the approach of students and teachers to this issue. Teachers more often point to the value of its expressive, compensatory and cognitive functions, which are less frequently perceived by students. It can be presumed that this relates to the pedagogical competence of teachers who have – and certainly should have – substantial knowledge about the essence of art therapy. On the other hand, the students participating in classes are provided with a sense of security, and the knowledge and skills acquired are associated with attractive forms of activity and relaxation for them. This discrepancy between the opinions of the teachers and students participating in the classes may also confirm that the classes conducted by school pedagogues with the use of art therapy methods meet the standards of work in the field of psychological and pedagogical assistance.

The use of art therapy in working with youth contributes to equipping adolescents with new desirable individual and social competences. The youth confirmed that through active participation in activities in which they directly interact with art, they acquire new skills essential for establishing constructive relations with others. For more than half of the respondents, these are activities that help to relieve tension and stress.

Teachers consider art therapy to be an important solution for overcoming student problems. In the opinion of all the interviewed teachers, indications for the participation of students in art therapy classes are emotional problems, disturbances in social relations, depression and anxiety, stress and low self-esteem. Unfortunately, teachers are not sufficiently aware of the value of art therapy methods in solving students' behavioral and didactic problems.

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