

# Art therapy in primary schools

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**Abstract:** *In this article, I want to present some examples of how we can within the primary school education, during the period of growing up, help a child in need in a different way. We know that these days there are more and more distresses for children, especially of a psychological nature. Some of this was also brought up by the epidemiological situation and the war situation around the world, both directly and indirectly, through the media, which surrounds us all the time. In addition to these factors, problems are also manifested in the upbringing of children, in the sense of lack of socialization, non-acceptance of differences, also in the form of the transfer of bad patterns of behavior from the parents to the child, etc. It is important that, as workers in education, we detect these signs in students and take appropriate action. Help is available from professionals such as psychologists and special and social educators. Many times, however, we have to do something for the well-being of the child and his development in the classroom, within which he must function. We can do something in the direction of improving the individual's well-being, so that the individual will be accepted into a group or class and that he will also be able to develop his potential. Many problems can be solved by talking alone, and in the course of fine arts, which I also teach, we can also use various therapeutic areas, through art therapy. This area is still fairly underdeveloped, but it is slowly gaining in popularity. In the paper itself, I give some examples of students' help, in the field of emotional-educational issues, in connection with the subject of fine arts and its optional subjects.*

**Keywords— art therapy, fine arts, education, help, psychology, mandalas, narrative**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there are more and more distresses for children, especially of a psychological nature. Epidemiological conditions and war conditions around the world have had an impact both directly and indirectly through the media. The media has great power and works very suggestively. In addition to these factors, there are also problems in raising children, in the sense of lack of socialization, non-acceptance of differences, also in the transfer of bad patterns of behaviour from parents to children, etc. Bad patterns can also be manifested by an unhealthy way of life (bad food, excessive use of electronic devices, insufficient exercise, etc.), which can further worsen the child's psychophysical condition and thus educational and emotional problems. It is important that, as workers in education, we detect these signs in students and take appropriate action. Help is available from professionals such as psychologists and special and social educators. Many times, however, we have to do something for the well-being of the child and his development in the classroom, within which he must function. We can do something in the direction of improving the individual's well-being, so that the individual will be accepted into a group or class and that he will also be able to develop his potential. Many problems

can be solved by talking alone. In the fine arts course, which I also teach, we can also use various therapeutic areas, through art therapy. This area is still fairly underdeveloped, but it is slowly gaining in popularity. The field deals with therapeutic methods of improving well-being and behavioural-cognitive abilities and it is intended for all individuals. Children with developmental disabilities and other psychological illnesses may be more susceptible to these therapeutic methods, and things must of course be adjusted for them if necessary.

In the following, I present some examples of such approaches within the art therapy. The examples are related to fine arts, so these approaches can also be included in the process of educational work in primary school. Specifically, within the subject of fine art and its curriculum [1] and the optional subject of fine art and its curriculum [2]. Of course, we must not forget the previously mentioned children with special needs, as well as other vulnerable individuals and groups, which are discussed in the examples collected in the book by Vidrih A. and Potočnik R. [4].

## 2. MANDALA AND ART THERAPY

### 2.1 MANDALA AS A MEDITATIVE TOOL

Mandalas are found in various cultures, such as with Buddhism, Hinduism, also with aboriginals, etc. Mandalas have been known to mankind for centuries. It is often concentric, circular in shape. According to ancient records, the meaning of the word mandala is said to represent a circle. It symbolizes infinite life that has no end and wholeness, in the sense of a relationship to infinity that extends beyond our bodies and minds. With the help of the mandala in meditation, we deepen and explore our inner wisdom. Today, mandalas are a popular symbol or a means of meditation that helps to strengthen concentration, calm the mind, move away from stress, depression and appreciate the beauty of nature, connection with oneself and creativity [6].



Fig. 1. An example of a mandala

As it has been said, the mandala as such can serve meditative purposes, with which we can improve our well-being. We can make it ourselves or according to a previous proposal. In the first case, we can talk about a work of art, a mandala, as a picture. In the following, I present a few more tasks from the field of creating mandalas, which primarily serve as a kind of short therapeutic record.

The following examples are somewhat summarized and adapted from the online course program, for work in the field of art therapy [3] and represent only one way of approach. Of course, it is necessary to adjust the tasks on a case-by-case basis

## 2.2 MANDALS FOR EVERY DAY

In this task, the students were given a ready-made mandala template with the title "My Day". Their task was to fill this mandala with an arbitrary selection of colours (but they could also use various symbols, numbers, etc., in the mandala spaces themselves). The painting technique was dry colours. Under the mandala, if desired, they could add another word about how they felt that day (Figure 2). The

example below (Figure 2) shows both warm and cool colours. We can explain that the student was surrounded by negative and positive emotions throughout the day, which he expressed with the words "sadness and happiness".



Fig. 2. Example of the "My Day" mandala

## 2.3 PAST-PRESENT-FUTURE WITH MANDALAS

In a similar way, as in the previous example (Figure 2), we started making mandalas for the past and present with the students. This depiction did not refer to their individual day and how they experience it or feel it, but rather their past, as well as their present, within a longer time frame. But we could also depict the future. This task is good precisely because the student can, within these time frames, do some self-analysis of what happened in the past and what, for example, it would be good to outline in the future (Figure 3a and 3b). In the example below (Figure 3a), it is possible to perceive a varied selection of colours, as well as in the second example (Figure 3b), which the author titled with the word "persistence". This can also be understood in the way that he learned from past experiences that it is necessary to persevere in life.

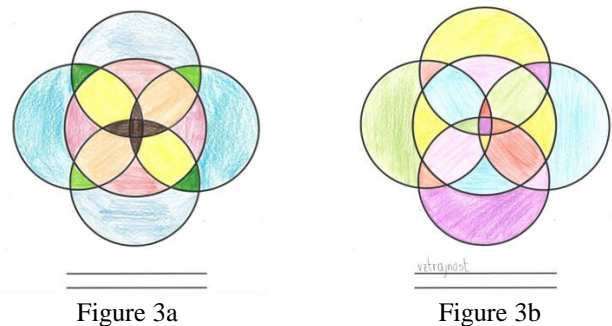


Fig. 3a and 3b. Example of mandalas from different periods (past (3a), present (3b))

### 3. AFFIRMATIONS AND ART THERAPY

Affirmations are positive sentences that encourage and are usually uttered to achieve a certain goal. When performing affirmations or when choosing the content of the affirmation, we take into account that the affirmation itself is realistic (it can actually happen), within our control (something you can influence yourself), that it is set in the present tense, is focused on the individual (is of a personal nature), has a positive attitude and that until this affirmation the individual also nurtures some passion [3].

Even in art therapy with the help of artistic creation, we can give the affirmation additional weight, with a kind of artistic superstructure. This means that, in addition to written affirmations, we can also depict things artistically.

In the following, I want to show an example of this type of depiction of affirmations (Figure 4). The students were given short instructions on what affirmation is and then the material (paper and drawing) for the basic layout of the work. If desired, they could use various painting techniques as an extension of the motif.



Fig. 4. An example of an artistic representation of an affirmation

The example above (Figure 4) represents the transition from a state of despair, sadness to a kind of victory, also through affirmations.

### 4. IMAGE OF VISUALIZATIONS

A work of art can also represent just the visualization of our desires, i.e. dream board. The aim of this task is to create a work of art that will represent "my dreams", what the individual wants in his future and what he wants to realize with the help of visualization. The power of the performance has a good psychological impact on the individual, which is why such an artistic representation is, however important. The organization of the visualization of desires in a visual image could be based on the system of the "perfect square" (Figure 5), authored by Florence Scovel Shinn, The Game of Life and How To Play It [5].

**Wealth** - finances, resources  
**Health** - physical, emotional, mental and spiritual  
**Love** - self-love, romance, friends, family relationships  
**Self-expression** - passions or voice how unique we are

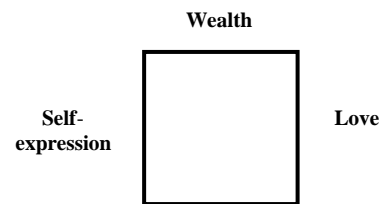


Fig. 5. "Perfect Square"

The example below (Figure 6) shows the visualization of wishes with the help of visual representation. The student could choose painting or drawing technique according to your own wishes.



Fig. 6. An example of an artistic rendering of the so-called dream board

From the upper part (Figure 6), it is possible to understand what the individual wants in life. What is important to him is life in nature (garden), work on himself (meditation), a weekend at the sea (boating), family (shown in the heart), happiness represented by a four-leaf clover and enough money for existence (possible property ownership).

## 5. ART DIARY

We know that an individual's diary entry can be of a purely therapeutic nature. In it, in a way, he confesses what he thinks and feels. For this individual, this confession is in the form of a diary entry, personal or an intimate thing. In these records, the individual writes down his negative and positive experiences, which he can then return to. This kind of self-analysis is welcome, both therapeutically and for personal growth.

All these records can also be upgraded with an artistic image. In this way, the record itself gets a visual image and is thus even more vivid. The ratio between the amount of text and visual or artistic image depends on the individual and his wishes.



Fig. 7. Example of rendering of an art journal

The above example (Figure 7) could show the author's personal experience from some dark period (staged death, dark atmosphere) and could also show some overcoming of obstacles (with a ladder) and the achievement of happiness (happiness shown through the heart, in the sense of fruit), on the depicted the tree. With this, somehow, the lower part of the artwork, from darkness, turns into something positive, which is also captured by the rainbow.

## 6. ART THERAPY AND VIRTUAL REALITY

The field of VR technology could also be added to art therapy. With VR glasses, we enter virtual reality, which can lead us to unique experiences. We know many good sides of VR glasses, both in the rehabilitation program of people who have experienced e.g. heart attack, as well as for example the use of VR glasses in reducing phobias with cognitive-behavioural therapy or with the so-called "Exposure therapy", which I already wrote about in the article entitled The Art of Suggestion. It is also important to point out that through VR glasses we can also be creative, in a slightly different way. Figure 9 shows artistic creation with the help of VR glasses and hand-held controllers. What we create is played on the computer monitor and at the same time inside the VR glasses. In this way, we can perceive the work in a more experienced way, we are actually a part of it, which gives it a new dimension. All of this could possibly be linked to other approaches, such as the field of visualization of wishes and affirmations, and with this technology, the experience of the individual could only be upgraded.

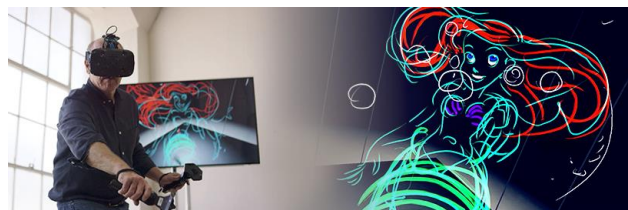


Fig. 8. Artistic creation with the help of VR glasses

## 7. CONCLUSION

All these examples of art therapy approaches presented in the previous chapters, within fine arts, serve as one of the ways we can work on improving the behavioural-cognitive abilities of an individual child. Their individual approach to individual expression leads to moments where the child can also open up emotionally and become more trusting of the pedagogical worker. All this leads to better working conditions in the field of education.

## 8. LITERATURE

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## 9. IMAGE RESOURCES

Figure 1: An example of a mandala  
(<https://myloview.com/sticker-vector-hand-drawn-doodle-mandala-with-hearts-ethnic-mandala-no-50BAB92>, obtained 24.6.2023)

Figure 8: Artistic creation with the help of VR glasses  
([https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2F3d-ace.com%2Fblog%2F3d-modeling-vr-based-apps-vs-the-desktop-classics-our-verdict%2F&psig=AOvVaw0QJrd0A7xPkBAVJjiyg8\\_t&ust=1649856325260000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAoQjRxqFwoTCKDYIPzPjvcCFQAAAAAdAAAAABA8](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2F3d-ace.com%2Fblog%2F3d-modeling-vr-based-apps-vs-the-desktop-classics-our-verdict%2F&psig=AOvVaw0QJrd0A7xPkBAVJjiyg8_t&ust=1649856325260000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAoQjRxqFwoTCKDYIPzPjvcCFQAAAAAdAAAAABA8), obtained 24.6.2023)