

The Psychotherapeutic Role and Challenges of Special Education Art Curriculum

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Abstract. Art is not only a tool for expression and communication, but also an effective way to promote emotional release, help self-awareness, and develop social skills. Art also plays an important role in the psychological therapy of special education. Through art courses, students can achieve self-improvement in the creative process, thus achieving the effect of psychological therapy. However, the implementation of special education art courses currently faces many challenges. The issue of special education for children has received widespread attention, but there is still insufficient emphasis on the psychological healing role of art courses. This article analyzes the psychological therapeutic effects and challenges of special education art courses. This article analyzes that special education art courses can help children with special needs express their emotions, build confidence, and cultivate social skills. However, in reality, there are still problems with the lack of personalized courses and unequal distribution of resources. Based on this, this article proposes the following suggestions, such as strengthening teacher training, achieving personalized development, optimizing resource allocation, and enhancing social awareness, hoping to alleviate the current predicament.

Keywords: Special education, art courses, psychological healing.

1. Introduction

Special education is an important aspect of social life that cannot be ignored. It not only concerns the growth and development of individuals but also reflects the inclusiveness and progress of a society. However, the challenges faced by special education are also evident, especially the psychological needs of special children, which are often more urgent and complex than material needs. In this context, art courses have gradually highlighted their indispensable position in special education with their unique charm. Art can express emotions and heal the soul. It can provide a platform for special children to express themselves freely and explore themselves, thus providing them with great comfort and support psychologically.

This study aims to explore in depth the psychological therapeutic effects of special education art courses, analyze the difficulties encountered in their practical operation, and seek practical and feasible solutions. This study is expected to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the promotion and implementation of special education art courses, thereby promoting the comprehensive development and mental health of special children.

2. The Psychological Therapeutic Effect of Special Education Art Courses

2.1. Theoretical Basis of Art Therapy

Art therapy is the use of art as a method and means to treat the physical and psychological illnesses of some patients, to promote recovery. At the same time, art therapy also plays an important role in fields such as preventive medicine [1]. Simply put, art therapy refers to the use of artistic creation and appreciation techniques such as art, dance, music, etc. by patients under the guidance of professionals to alleviate pain, release emotions, and achieve treatment and rehabilitation.

Margaret Namberg, an American psychiatrist, emphasized "analysis" and "motivation" through extensive experimental observations in the 1930s, gradually revealing the enormous potential of artistic expression in promoting individual mental health and self-exploration. Under the promotion

of Namberg, the method of "art therapy" gradually took shape. Through detailed interpretation of patients' artistic works, it is possible to gain insight into their deep psychological state and emotional needs. The process of artistic creation itself can stimulate the inner potential of patients, and promote personal growth and self-acceptance.

Special needs children may have difficulty communicating with others due to language development disorders, autism, emotional regulation difficulties, or other conditions. Art, as a non-verbal communication tool, can overcome language barriers. Through colors, lines, notes, or movements, they can visually express their emotions in a nonverbal way, which helps them release their emotions and express themselves more stress-free. Artistic creation can stimulate creativity, enhance self-confidence, and promote self-identity. This positive self-exploration helps them establish stronger and healthier psychological defenses to better cope with challenges in life.

In addition, art has social functions and can help children with special needs establish connections with others. In the process of artistic creation, they can collaborate with peers or therapists to share each other's works and feelings, thereby enhancing mutual understanding and respect.

The China Academy of Art has established an art psychological therapy teaching team composed of teachers from psychology, art, and other majors, creating a painting psychological analysis workshop. Famous experts and scholars are widely invited to teach the team, and regular psychological counseling case supervision and skill guidance are carried out to effectively enhance the professional ability of the teaching team. They have carried out the social practice of artistic psychotherapy for ten consecutive years, organized artistic psychotherapy teams for the Dujiangyan Irrigation Project, Zhoushan, Lishui, and other places after the Wenchuan earthquake, and focused on helping left-behind children, special children, and children with autism to promote their psychological growth. They regard shaping beautiful psychology for children as the focus of public welfare, guiding them to release emotions and stimulate their potential through art therapy. Since 2018, Wuqing District Special Education School in Tianjin has adopted the "1+1" education model for severely disabled children and adolescents who have not yet enrolled in school. This is the pairing and cooperation between teachers from special education schools and teachers from various towns and streets to provide educational services for severely disabled children and adolescents who have not yet enrolled in school in the community and at home.

Abroad, the St. Petersburg Museum takes "self-guidance" as its theme, providing visitors with a unique emotional experience [2]. Weill Cornell Medicine Qatar has collaborated with the National Museum of Qatar to develop an art therapy aimed at alleviating anxiety and depression in children with special needs [3]. The American Art Therapy Association is a professional organization dedicated to promoting the development, education, research, and professional practice of art therapy. Special needs children can receive specialized assistance through a series of professional guidance such as assessment by certified therapists at the institution.

In short, art, as a nonverbal expression, can help children with special needs release emotions, express themselves, collaborate and share, and develop comprehensively.

2.2. Specific Therapeutic Effects of Art Courses

Art courses have emotional regulation functions. Through artistic creation, special needs children can recognize their own emotions, express their emotions to teachers, and release negative emotions with the help and guidance of teachers, reducing anxiety, depression, and other negative emotions, making their mood peaceful and tranquil, promoting self-integration and potential stimulation, and providing motivation for psychological recovery and personality restructuring [4, 5].

Art courses have the function of boosting self-confidence. Participants can experience a sense of achievement in creation and expression by striving to create unique works. This sense of achievement is crucial in enhancing the self-confidence of special needs children, allowing them to feel their abilities and value. Positive feedback from others on a work can promote positive self-evaluation.

Art courses have the function of cultivating social skills. Art activities often require teamwork, which helps children with special needs learn how to interact, communicate, and collaborate with

others. Drawing therapy can help visitors vent their inner emotions, increase prosocial behavior, reduce negative behavior, and improve interpersonal relationships [6]. It can also help visitors adjust their self-awareness and understanding of their relationships with others promptly, explore new perspectives on interpersonal skills, and enhance their social communication abilities [7].

Art courses have cognitive development functions. The process of artistic creation is particularly beneficial for children with intellectual disabilities. Art therapy involves various forms of art such as painting, music, dance, and drama, allowing participants to express themselves creatively. This expression process helps special children transform their inner emotions and experiences into visual or perceptible forms, such as paintings, music works, or dance performances, which can promote the development of cognitive abilities such as hand-eye coordination and spatial perception.

3. Educational Difficulties in Special Education Art Courses

3.1. Unequal Distribution of Teacher Resources

The overall level of professionalization of teachers is relatively low, manifested in the low educational background of special education teachers. Currently, most special education teachers in schools have associate degrees, and some teachers do not have special education training backgrounds. The proportion of highly educated teachers is very small. This situation is particularly evident in the region, taking Yunnan in the western region as an example, where teachers mainly have bachelor's and associate's degrees. Overall, the teaching staff of high-end backbone teachers in special education schools is weak, their professional foundation is not solid enough, and their professional level is not precise enough [8].

Moreover, the professional level of teachers in special education art courses is generally not high. On the one hand, many teachers, although possessing an artistic background, lack professional training in the field of special education. On the other hand, teachers in special education majors often lack understanding and teaching abilities in art courses. This makes it difficult for teachers to provide personalized teaching based on students' special needs during the teaching process, which affects teaching effectiveness.

At present, there are also imperfections in the training mechanism for teachers of special education art courses. Firstly, the training course content is too theoretical, lacking practicality and operability, which makes it difficult for teachers to apply the knowledge learned to practical teaching after receiving training. Secondly, the training schedule and methods are not flexible enough, often conflicting with the teaching arrangements of teachers, making it difficult for them to fully participate in the training and improve their professional skills.

In addition, although the "1+1" education model has to some extent alleviated the shortage of special education teachers, in the long run, it is not conducive to the professional development of art teachers. This model can easily lead art teachers to overly rely on the assistance of special education teachers while neglecting the improvement of their own special education abilities and professional development.

3.2. Lack of Personalized Courses

There is a cognitive bias in special education in society, especially in the underestimation of the importance of art courses. Parents, schools, and society have limited support for art therapy education. Davis pointed out that the "abnormality" of disabled children does not lie in themselves, but in how society constructs the concept of "normal" to highlight their uniqueness [9]. Under the discourse system of "special" or "abnormal" disabled children, special education has become more of a "tool" for ordinary education to abandon those with poor academic performance and competitive failures, and disabled children have become "abandoned children" of ordinary education. Students receiving special education have always been a low-expectations group, considered helpless, incompetent, and dependent. Their academic misconduct and problematic behavior are tolerated. Once labeled as 'special' and 'abnormal', the abilities of disabled children are further denied and restricted, as ordinary

people are encouraged to believe that disabled children are restricted. They are advocated to sympathize with disabled children instead of accepting them [10]. Under such low expectations, due to the lack of scientific and systematic curriculum planning, the teaching content and methods of special art education courses often lack specificity and effectiveness. Due to their individual differences and special needs, special students require educators to design art courses that are more unique and diverse. However, the existing curriculum system rarely takes this into account, lacking specificity and effectiveness. Many schools lack the energy and find it difficult to develop personalized teaching plans based on each student's specific situation, often adopting a "one size fits all" teaching approach, which undoubtedly weakens the therapeutic effect of art courses in special education.

4. Possible Solutions

4.1. Strengthen Teacher Training

It is necessary to establish a comprehensive training mechanism for special education art teachers, covering pre-service training and in-service continuing education. Pre-employment training should focus on imparting special education theory, art teaching methods, and communication skills to special children. Continuing education in the workplace requires regular updates of teaching content, and the introduction of the latest educational concepts and teaching techniques, to ensure that teachers can continuously improve their professional competence.

Compared to general education, the importance of special education teachers is even greater. Compared to ordinary students, special needs students rely more on personalized education and emotional support from teachers. Special education teachers and inclusive education teachers face students with more diverse and complex needs, thus teachers face more complex situations and have higher requirements for teachers [11].

It is necessary to explore an integrated education model that adapts to the common growth of disabled children and ordinary children, promote paired assistance and joint construction between special education schools and ordinary schools, group integrated education, create an integrated education environment, and promote the integration of disabled children and ordinary children. It is necessary to strengthen inter-school resource sharing and integration, leverage the advantages of different schools, and promote standardized, timely, scientific, and professional work such as information reporting, educational evaluation, transfer placement, and individualized support for disabled students [12].

4.2. Achieving Personalized Development

Schools and teachers need to implement personalized teaching plans and develop diverse art therapy courses based on their own characteristics and student needs. The personalized teaching plan is a method of developing targeted courses for students to meet their learning needs. Teachers can analyze students' learning needs based on their types and levels of disabilities, and develop teaching objectives that meet the needs of each student. Schools should provide students with the necessary resources and support, including technical equipment and aids, to help them complete tasks. Also, teachers should monitor the progress of each student and adjust personalized teaching plans as needed. Implementing personalized teaching plans and creating a personalized learning environment for special education students, can better assist them in their studies.

4.3. Optimizing Resource Allocation

The government and various sectors of society can increase investment in special education art courses to promote a balanced distribution of resources. The government should establish special funds to support the development of special education art courses, including teacher training, textbook development, and teaching equipment updates.

Through school-enterprise cooperation, utilize social resources to enrich the content and practical opportunities of art courses. Enterprises can provide funding, technology, and practical platforms to help schools improve teaching conditions and enhance teaching quality. At the same time, enterprises can also take this opportunity to cultivate a sense of social responsibility and achieve a win-win situation.

Schools can hold symposiums to educate teachers on the concept of home-school cooperation so that teachers can break away from being mere educators and help them establish a new model of equal and mutual assistance with parents. In addition, the establishment of parent classrooms and two-way cooperation requires both parents and schools to update their ideological concepts. Schools should hold professional classrooms to provide professional training for parents, which can enhance their ideological literacy and explain professional rehabilitation knowledge to them. This will make parents realize that education is not achieved overnight and requires the collective efforts of all parties to enable students to develop comprehensively. The tripartite cooperation between families, schools, and society is beneficial for society to understand the needs of special needs children and their families, and thus provide more convenient services for special needs children [13].

4.4. Enhancing Social Awareness

Through media promotion, public welfare activities, and other means, widely disseminate the concepts and achievements of special education art courses, so that more people can understand and support this cause. The media should actively report successful cases and touching stories of special education art courses, and stimulate the attention and participation enthusiasm of all sectors of society.

Strengthen cooperation between families and schools, and jointly pay attention to and support the artistic therapy and education needs of special needs children. Schools should regularly communicate with parents to understand their opinions and suggestions and work together to create a better educational environment for special needs children. At the same time, parents should actively participate in their children's education and provide them with more care and support.

5. Conclusion

The special education art curriculum plays an important role in psychological therapy, as it can help special children express their emotions, build confidence, and cultivate social skills through artistic expression. However, in educational practice, this course faces various challenges, including insufficient teaching staff, lack of personalized courses, uneven resource allocation, and social cognitive biases. These difficulties seriously affect the implementation effectiveness of art courses in special education.

To effectively address these challenges, a series of measures can be taken. Firstly, strengthening teacher training is crucial. By implementing a systematic training mechanism, teachers can enhance their professional competence and teaching ability, enabling them to better meet the educational needs of special needs children. Secondly, it is crucial to improve the curriculum system by establishing clear curriculum standards and textbook systems to ensure the systematic and scientific nature of teaching. In addition, optimizing resource allocation is also an important way to solve difficulties, by ensuring balanced allocation and effective utilization of resources through government investment and school enterprise cooperation. Finally, enhancing social awareness is also an essential step, through media promotion, public welfare activities, and other means to raise public awareness of the importance of special education art courses and create a favorable social environment for the healthy development of the curriculum.

In summary, strengthening teacher training, achieving personalized development, optimizing resource allocation, and enhancing social awareness can effectively solve the difficulties faced by special education art courses in educational practice, promote their healthy development, and provide better educational services for special children.

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