

Creative Arts Therapies in a Masters' Degree Course in Mental Health Nursing

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1. Abstract

1.1. Background: Creative Arts therapies are a collective term for art therapy, music therapy, play therapy, drama therapy and dance therapy. Creative Art therapy sessions can be integrated in courses concerning mental health.

1.2. Method: We have integrated Creative Arts Therapy workshops in a core course named "Special Themes of Mental Health Nursing" in a MSc Program in Mental Health. The students of the program were: nurses, psychologists, sociologists, and medical doctors.

1.3. Results: All students participated in the courses found that the learning process was vivid, encouraging participation, and self motivation. The students identified their personal needs and they felt a personal connection with the learning experience.

1.4. Conclusion: All students admitted that the workshops were the optimal way for them to comprehend the courses' content, their capability to become therapists, as well as their obstacles and weaknesses, while working with patients in mental health.

2. Keywords: Art therapy: Workshops: Students: Msc programs

3. Summary

Although there is lot of research and literature concerning art therapy in clinical settings, less is known about integrating creative art therapy workshops in a structured form of a course in mental health education in a Nursing School in a master's degree program. This study aims to examine the effect of art therapy workshops on students' personal views and comprehension of therapeutic procedure in mental health.

4. Introduction

Arts therapies ("creative arts" or "expressive therapies") are a collective term for art therapy, music therapy, play therapy, drama therapy and dance therapy. The use of art therapies as a psychotherapeutic approach of patients with mental health problems is gaining field and has a unique part in many countries. Art therapies give the opportunity to the patient to participate in their own treatment and to express aspects of themselves in a "safe" environment [1].

During the last 40 years a great effort has been made for the recognition of the art therapist profession especially in USA and Great Britain. In these countries art therapy is well recognized as

a profession [2].

It is applied in all forms of hospitalized and extramural services and various types of mental health problems. Art therapy has proven to have positive results in illnesses like anxiety and depression, even though further research is needed to clearly assess the effectiveness in patients [3].

It has also an important role in therapeutic treatment of children and adolescence with Special Problems, Trauma, Behavioral Problems and Mental disorders. Art therapy as a non threatening form of treatment helps adolescence express their inner feelings and thoughts and facilitate their therapeutic interventions [4, 5].

Art therapies are applied also to special populations like geriatric population, substance abuse, neglect and violence, various handicaps etc [6-8].

In the previous year's professors had integrated workshops in their courses in order to teach students skills of patient management [9,10]. Additionally a number of studies have shown the efficacy of role playing method in students' education [11]. Salas et al (2013) [12] offered Playback Theatre to medical students. Arts especially theater was used effectively in education of health care

students (medical) as an attractive alternative way of learning [13].

Concerning students research had focused mainly in the problems e.g stress, burn out that undergraduate students of art therapy are facing during studies [14]. Few studies referred to the integration of art therapy lessons to train students. A study was referred to the implementation of an art therapy program into the training of medical students [15]. Although there is lot of research and literature concerning art therapy in clinical settings, less is known about integrating creative art therapy lessons in a structured form of a course in mental health education in a Nursing School in a master's degree [16].

5. Aim

The main targets of Creative Art Therapies lessons in a mental health course were for the students:

1. to understand in depth terms concerning psychotherapeutic procedures,
2. to examine their own need for inner analysis before become experts in mental health,
3. to participate in procedures concerning team work and recognition of personal difficulties
4. to communicate emotions associated with mental health
5. to evaluate the meaning of creative art therapies in therapeutic procedure

6. Sample

The number of the sample was nearly 10-12 for each year of the master's course which means 99 students in total. The students of the program were: nurses, psychologists, sociologists, and medical doctors.

7. Method

We have integrated Creative Arts Therapy workshops in a core course named "Special Themes of Mental Health Nursing" in a MSc Program in Mental Health. The duration of the course is 2-hours per week for 13 weeks in a single semester.

We have decided to include all forms of creative arts therapies and the course was designed to have one art therapy workshop in one week and the lecture and analysis in the next week. The course has a main instructor, an associate professor of mental health nursing experienced in arts therapies and an invited art therapist every other week, for combined workshop with students. All art therapists were given a certain topic to cover.

7.1. Evaluation methods

Students completed a short survey at the end of the course assessed each of the individual's experience. The survey was a 1-5

Likert scale questionnaire with 1 "disagree" to 5 "Strongly agree". They were encouraged also to note any additional information, thought or feeling concerning each of the art therapy sessions by answering the open-ended question: "Which is your positive and negative impression of each lesson?"

Additionally students were encouraged to keep a logbook as an essay that was evaluated at the end of the semester and was submitted as a part of the examination process of the course. This essay had to include the personal experience and training during the courses.

Students were informed for the experimental process and they were free not to participate in the final conversation, or to keep the content of the logbook for themselves.

This procedure within the learning context of the course lasted for 10 years/8 MSc rounds 2 years each one and data was gathered concerning views and opinions of all students.

8. Course description

Course name: Special Themes of Mental Health Nursing

The course is at the second semester of a two years masters program of "Mental Health" in Nursing Department, School of Health Sciences, University "X". The duration of the course is 2 hours/1 week for 13 weeks. The evaluation of the course is based in a written essay. At the last 2-hours lesson, at the 13th week, students present their essays.

Every other week (total of 6 weeks) the 2-hours lesson consisted of:

1-hour creative art therapy: music therapy, art therapy (drawing), dance therapy, play therapy, drama therapy (in this order).

1-hour that included theoretical explanation of the session and presentation of the creative art therapy technique. Also students could voluntarily share their impressions beyond the classroom.

These weeks were alternately with lessons concerning the theme that was presented in the creative art therapy workshop (6 weeks).

The main themes of the courses were:

- personal development through art session
- therapeutic use of self and self-awareness,
- therapeutic communication,
- role of the therapist,
- development of therapeutic relationship (therapist-client relationship)
- phases of a therapeutic relationship
- special relationships: family patterns, mother-child,

father-child, masculine-feminine

All instructors were given a certain theme and each session was a continuation to the previous one.

All students were encouraged to participate but they were free to quit if they felt uncomfortable and remained to the class like observers.

The media included instruments, painting, clay, collage, toys, and the body.

9. Results

The 97 out of 99 students (91 women 8 men, median age 26 range 23-30) responded to the whole procedure. One male and one female student were excluded from the final analysis because they had absences in some workshops (personal reasons). Their responds to the survey (agree to strongly agree) revealed that art therapy lessons enhanced and facilitated themes concerning therapeutic relationships, communication, cooperation with others, understanding of self. The responds showed that there was no problem in the presence of the professor of the course or the art therapists (**Table 1**).

Table:

- 1 Not applicable
- 2 Strongly disagree
- 3 Disagree
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

Creative Art therapy lessons (CAT)	1	2	3	4	5
CAT provided me with info concerning mental health					97
CAT developed self-awareness					97
CAT enhanced my understanding of therapeutic relationship				15	82
CAT prepared me for therapeutic communication				29	68
CAT prepared me for a member in a therapeutic team				17	80
CAT facilitated the express of feelings					97
CAT facilitated the express of thoughts				23	74
The art therapists were adequate teachers				12	85
The professor of the course was an effective coordinator					97

9.1. Open ended Question

“Which is your positive and negative impression of each lesson?”

The total of students (97/97 100%) mentioned that creative art therapy lessons were meaningful, interesting, unique, funny and emotional in the same time and educational in an effective way.

Below are some selected positive remarks shared by the students:

1. One student admitted that in the beginning she was very frustrated with the idea to participate in a workshop but at the end she couldn't believe the amazing effect of this method in order to understand self and others
2. Other student told that creative art therapy workshop made it easier to understand therapeutic terms

3. A student shared how she had conflicted emotions about working with psychiatric patients and art therapy lessons helped to confront these feelings

4. Another student mentioned that the learning is permanent. I remember every information given in the course.

5. One student shared that became closer with the other students like a therapeutic team “an experience that will never forget”

Below are some selected negative remarks shared by the students:

1. A student mentioned that “even if there was a therapeutic environment and I was feeling safe, to use my body and dance in front of everybody was quite difficult” (remark for dance therapy)

2. Another student said “I was a little bit scared when I have realized my deep emotions when I heard the second piece of music. I didn't know what caused these feelings...it was awkward.” (remark for music therapy)

3. A general remark from the students was that time was limited, they had the feeling that the course was incomplete, they needed more analysis of what had happened

4. A student said that she was embarrassed in the beginning, it was difficult to find play a role in front of everybody (remark for drama therapy)

10. Discussion

In this study we report the use of creative art therapies in a course about mental health in a master's degree program. In previous years they have used short time art activities with the aim to reduce students' stress or enhance self –awareness [17,18]. In a previous research they evaluated nursing students' experience of undertaking an interdisciplinary Art in Health elective with positive results [19]. In our MSc educational program all kind of creative art therapies were prepared to fit to the course description in a structured way, in one semester, with certain aims meeting overall course's goal. Every year 10-12 students enrolled to the master's degree of “Mental Health” in Nursing School in University “X”. The study lasted 5 years with a number of 59 students participating in the course of “Special Themes of Mental Health Nursing”.

All students participated in the courses of creative art therapies mentioned a number of positive results. They found that the learning process was vivid and encouraging participation, and self motivation. The students identified their personal needs and they felt a personal connection with the learning experience. The result of the personalized learning was that students discovered their strengths and weaknesses and developed skills like critical-thinking and communication with others.

Students referred that creative arts therapy workshops made them feel safe, connected with their classmates and facilitated open communication [20]. As a result they understood the value of working collaboratively, and communicating with other therapists. Creative arts therapies help to express feelings in a non threatened way for themselves.

Music therapy lesson proved to be a different experience for the students. In the less intrusive manner comparing to the other lessons (the students was hearing different pieces of music without participating), this lesson created in-depth experiences. They admitted that unknown feelings and a different realization of self came to light. The results of this program are consistent with a study by so (2019) who described music therapy students' experience of group therapy and found that musical experience was an emotional container and clinical development. Music therapy lessons have proven to be a valuable experience for the improvement of clinical and personal skills of a music therapist [21].

Art therapy (drawing) lessons seemed to have the stronger positive impact on students. Their comments in total had revealed a perceived growth in terms of knowing self and be prepared for professional role performance as a future therapist. The conclusions of the current study were consistent with a research in academic lecturers in Thailand [22]. Students found the experience to be the more protective and interesting. They have overcome their hesitations concerning drawing skills and they had enjoyed the lesson. They also mentioned that they discovered new parts of themselves and in the same time, they understood in depth the educational terms according to the courses' guideline.

Dance therapy lessons had a more educational role for the students. They realized how dance therapy can improve psychomotor skills in disease like dementia and Parkinson's disease [23,24]. They also had the feeling of freedom. Students noticed that dance therapy lessons promote socialization and integration with the other student's possible positive results for patients with schizophrenia [25].

Play therapy lesson had a multiple cause because it combined educational goals, therapeutic goals and play therapy with adults. Students found the experience extremely interesting and amusing. They realized how this kind of therapy can create a safe and therapeutic environment for children with various problems like autism, and anxiety [26]

Students surprisingly noticed that play therapy enhanced their social competence a result found in studies concerning preschoolers. They referred that play therapy promotes the group process and the recognition of emotions and thoughts in a "relaxed" and "gentle" way [27].

Drama therapy is a method of psychotherapy using theater and drama and giving at the client the space to express feelings through storytelling and acting. As students noted role playing in a safe environment reveals issues and important problems without talking. Previous research has shown the benefits of using theater (psychodrama and sociodrama) in health care education [28].

Drama therapy lesson was placed on purpose at the end of the course, like a synthetic conclusion of all therapeutic knowledge acquired in the previous lessons. Students in their diaries recognized this synthetic role as a more comprehensive self-awareness, a rising of professionals and therapeutic issues and an improvement in communication skills and group work. Drama therapy incorporates role-playing techniques that they have already proven to be efficacious in teaching and increases also the realization of inner aspects of self. (King et al 2014). Psychodrama – a type of dram therapy was used as a teaching and learning strategy to nursing students and the in the results were satisfactory [29].

Students identified two main negatives in the course. Firstly, it was the length of the daily course. They all asked for the hours to be at least 4, which was impossible according to the MSC's timetable. Secondly, they needed further analysis of their works. Some of them said that the third hour of explaining the method was "rather boring" and they preferred a deeper analysis of their performance [30]. However, this is forbidden in a students' course. It was explicitly explained to them that the purpose of the course is mainly educational and not therapeutic. For this reason in all classes the presence of the therapist as well as the responsible professor of the course, who is also a therapist, were required.

When a student had a negative remark this concerned mainly one type of the creative art therapy lesson e.g a student may had found difficult to express herself in dance therapy. Students may found the majority of therapies interesting and intriguing but one type may not be suite for them. In general from the student's remarks music therapy, dance therapy and drama therapy were the most difficult to participate. Music therapy revealed emotions that they were not prepared to recognize and confront. Dance therapy and drama therapy lessons required the use of their body and sometimes in contact with the others that made some of them feel uncomfortable. The importance of these remarks was that these feelings were mainly at the beginning of the lesson and later they participated without any problem in the learning process. It was important that none of the students asked to quit the participation during the process.

Mental health environment is highly stressed and art therapy – like other forms of art integrated in educational procedure -

provides a safe environment to recognize thoughts and feelings and a possible ease in some of the pressure [31].

Limitations

It is possible that some students may have felt intimidated by participating in an art therapy with a faculty given the fact that everyone must be involved. The workshops were not a complete curriculum itself because according to the master thesis program we were obliged to exchange them with oral courses concerning the themes. This maybe had an effect on session's continuance. The evaluation took part at the end of the course and some information concerning the initial art therapy sessions may have been missed or forgotten.

11. Conclusion

Art therapy sessions in the main course of a master's degree mental health program proved powerful tool to help students realize the subject of mental health, communicate between them, begin to analyze themselves in a therapeutic basis through healthcare related personal experiences. All students referred that art therapy lessons helped them to comprehend the courses' content, and to recognize their capability to become therapists, while working with patients in mental health.

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