

USING EXPRESSIVE ART THERAPY IN THE HEALING PROCESS OF DELINQUENT ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a study that used phenomenological approach to understand the experiences, perceptions, beliefs and feelings of delinquent adolescents through their creative arts work. Specifically, adolescents' experiences were explored in the therapy in which expressive aspects are used. This creative process can ameliorate emotional conflicts, inculcate self-awareness and promote healing. The use of creativity encourages adolescents to participate more actively in their healing and recovery process. Significant themes and patterns that emerge from the use of expressive art therapy are explored in group counselling. Seven teenage girls who were involved in delinquency and detained in a juvenile detention centre participated in this study. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation in counselling process and analysis of documents using personal diary. Giorgis' recommendation concerning analysis of the interview data was followed. Six main themes were identified; catharsis, sharing, cohesion, awareness, installation of hope and experiencing the creative connection. This therapeutic process engagement promotes spontaneous expression of subconscious, suppressed feelings and emotions. The implications of the findings for counsellors and future researchers are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Expressive Art Therapy, Phenomenology, Delinquent Adolescents

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the issue of delinquent adolescents has become more endemic. The moral decay and the deterioration of identity among the adolescents are not foreign anymore. Even though the male teenagers tend to be more involved in the juvenile crimes, the percentage of the misbehaving delinquency by female teenagers also shows an increment in the percentage (Quinsey, Skilling, Lalumiere & Craig, 2004). Delinquent behavior includes acts such as theft, robbery, rape, adultery, murder, drug addiction, disobedient to parents, challenging teachers, truancy, extortion, bullying, snatch thieves, sexual activities and others (Hairunnaja Najmudin, 2003). Reiss (1951) also defines delinquent behavior as a result of failure to act of personal or social control in the production line and conduct incompatible with the norms of the social system.

A lot of teenagers in Malaysia are involved with delinquency involving immoral activities such as misbehaviours in schools, smoking, drug abuse, illegal racing, snatch thieves, bullying, free sex, gambling, carrying weapons, killing and many other misbehaviour. The amount of cases involving teenagers has recorded a growth from year to year. The statistics from Malaysia Community Welfare Department are even more alarming. Adolescentsinvolved in the crimes including delinquency have increased from 6, 056 cases and it increased again to 7, 021 cases in the year 2005 (Malaysia Community Welfare Department, 2006). Other than the increase in the cases, the amount of cases involving students aging from 13 till 18 also showed some increment. According to the statistics by Terengganu State Welfare Department, youngsters involved

in the delinquency from years 2012 to years 2013 collectively increase from 234 cases to 254 cases. Offences that show the most obvious increase are the ones involving property; namely stealing, owning stolen property, robbery, extortion, attack or house breaking, apart from crime which involve humans like murder, injury, rape, violate, peeping, incest and others.

The involvement of the teenagers in this issue clearly shows to us that this group of people has been influenced by the unhealthy behaviour which can give a negative impact from the psychology aspect. Negative psychological impact can also lead to dangerous activities or behaviour (Camilleri, 2007). One of the ways to understand the youngster is by how this individual personality relates to the delinquency (Eaton, Krueger, McGue, & Lacono, 2009). The teenagers' experiences and how they see the issues should be explored in depth. Their perception, behaviour and feelings should be understood in order to find out what is kept within them. This is because at times they are not able to bring out their thinking and feeling verbally to the adults (Graham & Sontag, 2001).

By using these various expressive media in expressive art therapy activities, it helps the adolescents to fill the gap between concrete thinking and abstract thinking (Phey Ling Kit & Lan Teo, 2012). Through these art works, most of the teenagers can express their feelings, thinking by producing what they feel through certain symbols (Bennink, Gussak, & Skowan, 2003; Howard, 2001). Expressing through this creative art gives a space for the teenagers who went through the crisis within themselves to create an imagination that says and place the image naturally according to their own creativity (Graham & Sontag, 2001).

Expressive Art Therapy can be defined as a technique that uses a creative medium during the counselling session as a way to simplify the whole therapy session (Wilson & Ziomek-Daigle, 2013). Expressive Arts Therapy is the practice of using art in an integrated way to foster human development, growth and healing (Atkins, Adams, McKinney, McKinney, Rose, Wentworth & Woodworth, 2003). Rogers (1993) also define Expressive Arts Therapy as an experience of using art as a therapeutic tool. Expressive art therapy can also be understood as a usage of multiple types of art materials such as dancing, drama, drawings, music, colouring photography, carving, writings, bibliotherapy, theatre and sandcastle that is within the context of psychotherapy, counselling, remedial and medication (Malchiodi, 2008). A Combination of different types of art were also used to foster personal growth and development in society (International Expressive Arts Therapy, 2014).

According to Sh Marzety Adibah and Zakaria (2014), creative art or expressive therapy is a method or a comfortable way for the children and the teenagers to communicate with the elderly people on the internal and external issues of themselves. The usage is a channel for the children and the teenagers to express state and shower their experiences and their feelings which they are unable to express orally. This issue is also very crucial for the teenagers because art allows them to express their cognitive, development and emotional level (Graham & Sontag, 2001). In addition, arts and creativity became a way of communication that help the teenagers to avoid possibilities for them in holding their unhealthy emotions to themselves or to express the emotions in an unhealthy way (Saunders & Saunders, 2000).

The expressive art therapy is a beautiful method to state oneself through symbols and metaphors, indirectly it tells on how someone would feel towards any other individual that they hate (Sh Marzety Adibah & Zakaria Mohamad, 2014). In other words, it is a way to extract negative feelings out from their soul without hurting anyone. The use of this expressive art therapy can also help the teenagers to communicate comfortably without using the help from the art and creativity that represent themselves to be a potential remedial tool (Finn, 2003). Art also becomes a potential tool to cure

and to treat (Finn, 2003). This creative process is said to be able to help in vanishing the emotional conflicts and also helps in implementing self-awareness and to cure oneself (Deaver, 2002).

In addition, the expressive art therapy can also be referred as the creative and integrated art therapy when used as the purpose for treatment (Atkins et al., 2003; Estrella, 2005; Knill, Barba & Fuchs, 1995). The usage of this variable art media is a combined approach that can be implemented in various different places (Riley, 1999). The usage of expressive arts therapy is not only in individual cases but also in group counselling.

There are a number of research that use arts therapy towards adolescents in group counselling. Among the research topics discussed about group arts therapy include a research to enhance the academic achievement and involvement (Wadson & Wirtz, 2005), a research to identify and express the feeling in an appropriate manner such as anger and aggressive (Hanes, 2000; Hartz & Thick, 2005; Wadson & Wirtz, 2005), a research to decrease the symptom of depression and sadness (Hanes, 2000; Testa & McCarthy, 2004), a research to explore the family dynamics, relationships and reduce family conflicts (Hanes, 2000; Robertson, 2001; Testa & McCarthy, 2004), a research regarding grief and loss issue (Testa & McCarthy, 2004), a research to improve and resolve problems (Hartz & Thick, 2005; Wadson & Wirtz, 2005), a research to enhance self-confidence and self-concept (Mahmoud Roghanci, Abdul Rasyid Mohamad, See Ching Mey, Khoda Morad Momeni & Mohsen Golmohamadian, 2013), a research to lower the ideas of suicide and self harm (Hanes, 2000), a research regarding lowering the symptom of "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder" and trauma (Hartz & Thick, 2005; Rosal, McCulloch-Visliser, & Neece, 1997), a research pertaining sexual abuse (Hanes, 2000) and a research regarding improving social skills (Hanes, 2000; Hartz & Thick, 2005; Wadson & Wirtz, 2005; Testa & McCarthy, 2004).

Therefore, the researcher in this qualitative research uses expressive art therapy as a tool, medium and as a way or method to understand the experience of the teenagers who are involved in the delinquency behaviours and also their experiences on their overall perception on their involvement in the crime activity, besides looking for the actual meaning in their life by using certain materials or various art mediums prepared in the group counselling session.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design

This research is a qualitative research investigation that uses the phenomenology approach. According to Creswell (2003), the qualitative research is a suitable research for a deep research on an activity, incident or process. Thus, the design of this research is in line with the objective of this research which is to understand in depth on the life experience of the seven female teenagers who are involved in the delinquency behaviour by using the expressive art therapy in the group counselling session. Phenomenology is an approach that gives a focus to defining meaning process and the meaning to an interactional phenomenon (Merriam, 2002).

Participant

The participants for this research were chosen using an objective sampling method. Seven female teenagers who are involved in the delinquency behaviour problems aging from 16 to 18 which were arrested in a rehabilitation centre in Terengganu, Malaysia were chosen for this research. Teenagers taken as subjects in this study are from those who had relevant experience of the phenomenon being studied. The study participants were given an informed consent form to obtain the voluntary consent

Procedure

This research was conducted for four months with eight group counselling sessions using expressive arts therapy. For each session, 90 minutes were allocated. Several techniques of expressive arts therapy were used and conducted in the group counselling session, they were ; Name Collage, Life Mind Map, Feeling and Excessive Negative Thinking, Movements and Waves Painting and Butterfly Story.

Data Collection

The data for this research were collected from a few resources which were the interview, observation and document analysis such as the journal writing, the paintings, hand work arts done by the research participants and the research field notes. The usage of these various data is a triangulation technic of various resources and data consolidation (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In-depth Interviews were conducted in this study;, based on a phenomenological model developed by (Seidman, 1998). This interview comprises of three sessions with different focus respectively. First interview focused on participants’ life history. Second interview focused on research topic and the third interview was the reflection of the meaning of each experience.

The second source of this research is observation of verbal and non-verbal of each participants. Observation is a process to obtain direct information from the original source in the field. From this observation, the researcher managed to record the actions, conversations and incidents that happened on each participant during the conducted group counselling. The researcher also recorded the observation notes or field notesof each participant during the group counselling sessions.

The other source of this research is documentation i.e. the participants’ diary as well as their artworks. During the research, the participants were requested to complete their diary writing by using various arts materials to decorate their diary according to their creativity. The information obtained from this diary had enhanced and improved the data gathered from interview and observations.

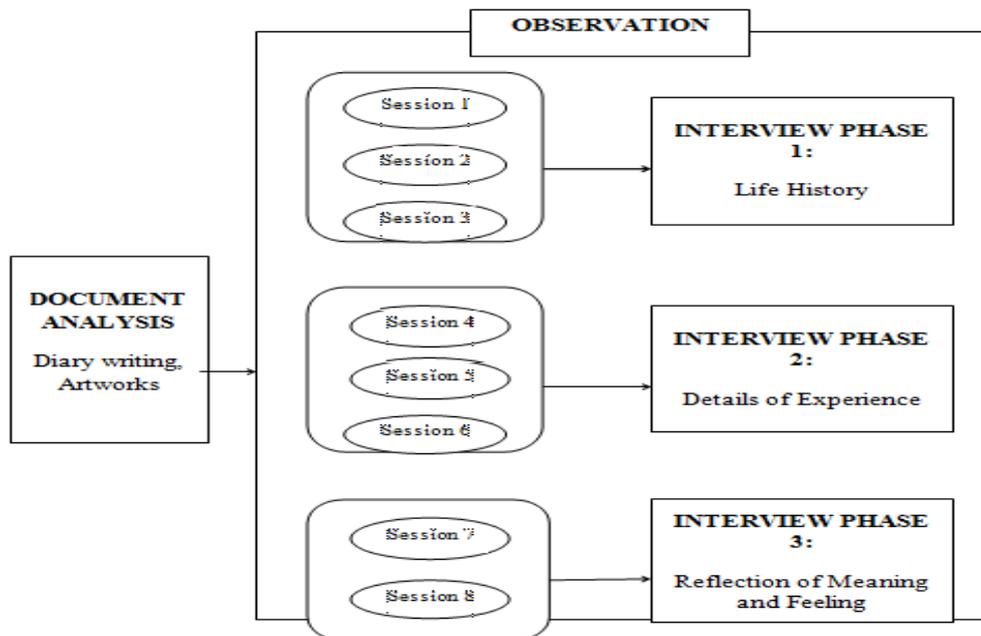


Figure 1: Data Collection

RESEARCH FINDING

A few themes appeared in this research based on the experience shared by the teenagers by using the Expressive Art Therapy in the group counselling session. The main themes appeared in this research are experiencing creative relationship, sharing, planting hopes, awareness, catharsis and cohesion.

NUM	THEME	SUBTHEME
1	Experiencing Creative Relationship	fun, confidence, getting through meaning, creative simulation, being unique and different.
2	Sharing	spontaneously sharing, allow sharing.
3	Planting Hopes	new hope, continue life.
4	Awareness	awaken from along dream, big changes and differences.
5	Catharsis	decrease the pressure, stable the emotion, relief
6	Cohesion	understand one another, appreciated and loved.

Theme 1: Experiencing Creative Relationship

Most of the subjects in this research share their experience of having creative relationship while undergoing the counselling session using the expressive art therapy. A few comments stated by all the subjects in experiencing the creative relationship are fun, confidence, getting through meanings, creative stimulation, reflection and connecting experiencing, being unique and different. There are a few subjects who have shared their experience in feeling the real fun while producing the creative art activities. As experienced by Khaty (not actual name), she stated that the product has given her happiness and she also noted that she started to feel that the cheerfulness was back in her life especially while experiencing the butterfly art story activity.

“I really like this session...because I am able to differentiate the problems and the hopes in me. I have made up my mind to become like this butterfly... once was looked down and was disgusted...finally becoming a beautiful butterfly”

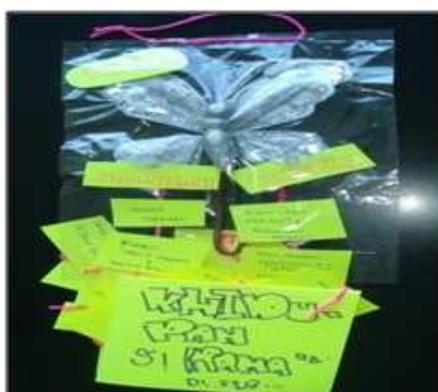


Figure 2: Khaty's Butterfly Story

Theme 2: Sharing

All the subjects in this research shared their experience and stated that this expressive art therapy session allowed them to do some sharing and discharge the issue in depth. They shared that the art activity that they went through had motivated them and able to make them discharge their feelings spontaneously without any enforcement.

Lily (not actual name) mentioned that the life map draft technique in the expressive art therapy allowed herself to confess and share everything about her life experiences. Lily said;

“Lily got to know how life was during childhood days”

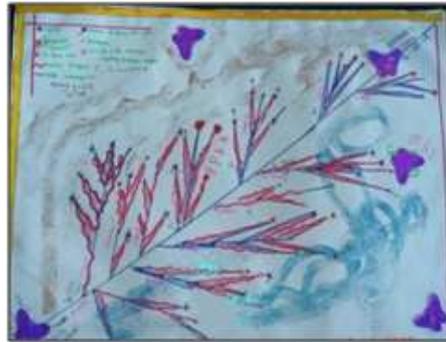


Figure 3: Lily's Life Mind Map

Besides, six out of seven subjects stated that the usage of the expressive art therapy have allowed them to perform expression and sharing spontaneously. The art activities, that had been performed by them through symbols and certain objects helped them to state their actual feelings, sharing experiences and express everything that they had been holding back naturally and spontaneously without any enforcement. According to Salina (not actual name), the art activities helped her to talk about and share her life experiences unintentionally. Salina said;

“I also felt so happy to reveal all the secrets that was hidden behind my face that always puts up smiles and laughter”

Theme 3: Planting Hopes

Most of the subjects also did their sharing that they could feel creativity being created by them and finally they were able to boost the spirit and give them a new hope to continue life and to demolish their earlier perception they had that their life has been crashed and doomed. For Zaza (not actual name), her spirit is getting stronger to continue her life after she used this expressive art therapy. Zaza said;

“When I applied this expressive art therapy, I became more confident to change. The utmost is I do not want to revenge and not to be enemies with anyone. This feeling can be controlled and can bring me confidence that I can change for the sake of God”

On the other hand, Fifi (not actual name) mentioned that her soul was empty before this and now it is full with spirit and full with hopes to create happiness.

“By following this first session, I hoped that my name given by uncle will bring a new hope for myself and my family. I hope I can bring more success for myself so that I can help others who are in need.”

Theme 4: Awareness

The subjects also shared their experiences that using the expressive arts have given them a deep awareness within themselves. They finally are able to accept the fact and they are smarter. They said that the experiences in doing art activities in the group session provides them awareness as though they are being awakened from a long dream. Most of them have also seen a big changes and differences that are happening in their life before and after going through the sessions.

Rina (not actual name) also expressed her experiences on awareness that was gained through the butterfly story. Rina expressed by relating awareness gained through the creativity done in the butterfly story session.

“I realised that my life is like the butterfly. I believe that my life will change and I will have a bright future later on”

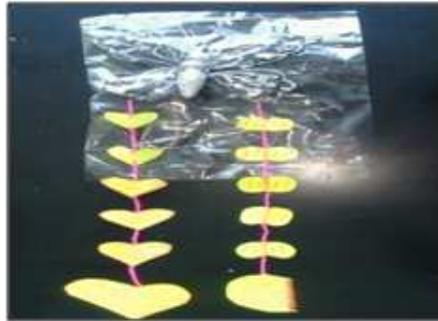


Figure 4: Rina's Butterfly Story

Most of the subjects also stated that they can accept the fact and has a brighter mind after going through the session using the expressive art therapy. They have accepted that every challenge, obstacles and difficulties that they are going through all this while have been parts of their life that needed to be faced by every human being. Fifi (not the real name) stated that she can accept the fact that life is like a wave. The feelings that shadow her will always come but one day it will all pass by and life will always face many ups and downs like the waves.

“The waves’ pictures created pictures my life which is always waving up and down. What is certain, i do not want this feeling of fear to keep on haunting me. I do not want a strong wave to keep on appearing in my life, I just want some peace in my coming future.”



Figure 5: Fifi's Movement and Waves Painting

Theme 5: Catharsis

In this context, many subjects have experienced and discussed in the various psychological issues that finally made them to be in trauma and having obvious emotional disturbances. However, finally, they are able to express on a few changes and catharsis that occur based on the experiences undergoing the counselling session using the expressive art therapy. They mentioned that the creativity usage and the art will be able to decrease the pressure and help to stabilize the emotion and provide a relief towards the emotional disturbances that they have been through.

Salina (not actual name) stated that all the burdens have been thrown out in expressing this painting, drawing and other appearances of the objects created.

“Various feelings were kept in the heart.. but now, my mind is peaceful after I manage to throw out what i have been holding and keeping all this while and I know that I have to be strong to accept the fact and reality of life..”



Figure 6: Salina's Feeling and Excessive Negative Thinking

Most of the research subjects also did share that experience through art therapy in group counselling is a technique that will able to stabilise their emotions. Zaza (not actual name) also stated that her emotions have healed and been stabled since following the expressive art therapy counselling session. She had thrown all her revenge, hatred, anger towards her mother into the waves that she drew throughout the session.



Figure 7: Zaza's Ocean's Movement and Painting

Theme 6: Cohesion

The usage of this creative art in the group session is a way that has allowed a high cohesion among the subjects. They created creativity that can give a deep relationship that can tie a similarity bond and understand one another. All the subjects state that they felt able to be understood, appreciated and loved. The responds and the observation that was given by each of the group member towards the paintings, sketch and objects as well as symbols that was created made each member to have a high desire to find the meaning behind the objects and the symbols. Salina (not actual name) said that she felt appreciated and loved when her group members were interested to listen and to know the objects and the symbols created.

“My friends showed interest by asking questions and I can feel the passion that was given”

To Khaty (not actual name), the mixture of the music and the movements made her really able to be understood by others. Khaty said that the touch from the movement made herself being appreciated.

“I felt that I was being understood because everything that I expressed in this session was commented by the counsellor and my friends also gave me a lot of spirit and support”

The message through this creativity and art has given a creative stimulation that can relate the inner side of a person in picturing the objects created. The pictures of the objects created by each subject has made them to be able to feel and understand other people's experience fully. To feel and understand others' experience has given the a high dose of spirit to accept as a part of their life. Kamelia (not actual name) shared story on how she got and also felt others' difficulties. Through the pictures of the objects, symbols, paintings, sketch, and movements, she felt the actual matter initiated by the subject and the group members during the session.

“Before this I thought that I was the only one having problems in the world. I was thinking that my problem is worse than others. However after joining this therapy session, I can feel and get to know my friends' problems and experience. Many things were shared with them, and also by them.”

DISCUSSIONS

After going through the counselling session eight times within four months the research was carried, all the subjects can give responds on the experience in performing the expressive art therapy in group counselling. A few themes appeared based on the sharing which are the creative relationship, sharing, planting hopes, awareness, catharsis and cohesion.

Based on the findings, the research shows that the techniques used in the expressive art therapy offer ways that are harmless for an individual to express their feelings verbally and non-verbally. Techniques in expressive art therapy allow adolescents in this study to not only reflect on and share their life stories with group members, but also to give and receive feedback with group members as well. In this counselling process, adolescents are able to discover and accept the unacceptable parts of themselves and to recognize and integrate the positive aspects of themselves, such as the ability to care for others. This self-awareness and acceptance by others help to motivate them to change their maladaptive behaviors.

The techniques also allow the participants to express themselves in many ways using art and visual medium, especially if the subjects are unable to express their feelings verbally because of the disturbances faced by them. The creative process also allows the teenagers to face issues intentionally and unintentionally. This finding is in line with the writing by Wilson and Ziomek-Daigle (2013) that states the use of expressive art therapy in bringing what is being aware and unaware of.

The participants in this research also did experience sharing that the use of expressive art therapy allows them to do sharing and expressing spontaneously on the actual feelings. The outcome of the observation in the research is in line with the work of Butchalter (2004). He explained that the images and symbols in the drawings, paintings, scribbling and a few other techniques that were used in the expressive art therapy functioned as a transport to motivate the process of sharing, communicating, growing and knowledge. Art and creativity are actually playing roles as a natural method to allow expressing and communicating that can create sharing (Butchalter, 2004).

The outcome of the experience sharing by the teenagers that are involved with the delinquent behaviour in this research has also showed an obvious effect that were gained by the participants after going through the expressive art therapy session. Most of them discuss on the decreasing pressure level that were faced by them before this. The use of the expressive art therapy in the group counselling has also decreased and stabilised their emotion through expressing emotions. The participant in the research has accomplished a new understanding on the symptoms on their sufferings that were borne by them. The discussion that was stated in the catharsis theme has actually been widely discussed by the

previous researches. Carolan (2001) explains that the expressive art therapy actually is a therapy that is not only working as a problems exploration tool but also works to create various therapeutic factors that were proven to cure and treat the client. According to Appleton (2001), the use of intervention based on the art and creativity has given a path to the painful and traumatic images and memories that can be expressed in order to help reduce the symptoms of a person's psychology pressure.

The findings also explained that the use of certain techniques in the expressive art therapy has given new hopes and gives a new spirit to the participants to build a new life. The art techniques and the creativity motivate a new form of energy and power. The image visualisation technique that was carried out in the therapy offered a new approach for the participants to express various meanings that can help them to refresh the feelings of the participants by manipulating various art mediums.

The outcome of the research also portrays a few important elements that have appeared in the cohesion. The use of the creativity and the art process in the group session is one of the medium that exist in a high cohesion among the subjects. The cohesion created a strong feeling of being the same and fair and helps in understanding one another in depth. They shared the experiences on being understood, appreciated and loved throughout the process of relating creativity and arts. In the cohesion theme, the researchers found out that the expressive art therapy can help the teenagers to find the definition and the actual meaning in their life. The findings discussed by Lazzari and friends (2005). They explained that the creative art relationship is important during the experiences exploration process in creating an art and creativity project. The product of this art and creativity project is a way of expressing and serves as a chance for the clients to communicate with others to develop the understanding on themselves and on others.

In conclusion, expressive arts therapy is a technique that can be used and featured to help individual or group in crisis, conflict or psychological disorder to obtain internal healing. The research also gave an implication on certain fields. The implication involves the knowledge field, the counselling field and the implication on the research methodology, implication on the nation and community's main agenda which is the development of the individual.

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