

Usage of Painting Art Therapy in Mental Health Education of Chinese College Students

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the usage of painting art therapy in the psychological survey, screening, psychological consultation, psychological crisis intervention and treatment of specific psychological problems, among others, of college students. It also delves into the application status and advantages of painting art therapy in the mental health education of college students for the promotion and application of painting art therapy in China. An online search for related literature on painting art therapy in PubMed, ScienceDirect, EBSCO database and China Academic Journals was conducted using the keywords 'art therapy', 'painting', 'emotion', 'psychological survey', 'psychological screening', 'psychological consultation' and 'crisis intervention', which were searched individually or in combination. A total of 25 articles were cited for review. Painting art therapy was found to be widely used in all aspects of college students' mental health education. It has a high degree of acceptance, has the unique advantages of non-verbal therapy and is very effective. Educators should use painting art therapy not only for addressing the mental health of students but also apply this therapy to other areas of Education Psychology.

Keywords: college student; mental health education; art painting therapy; psychological; intervention

INTRODUCTION

As early as the beginning of the 20th century, painting art therapy originated from people's research on the works of artists with mental disorders and was later tried as an auxiliary means of treating mental patients. Afterwards, Freud's and Jung's psychoanalysis theories officially led painting therapy to the field of psychotherapy. The real academic research and application of painting art therapy in China began in the 1990s. In the past 10 years, painting art therapy has entered the public's field of vision under the leadership of Dr. Yan Hu and various others and has become a psychological counselling tool in colleges and universities. It has become a technology that is of wide concern and use by college psychologists, college teachers, psychology-related social practitioners and psychology enthusiasts.

METHODOLOGY

An online search for related literature on art therapy of painting in PubMed, ScienceDirect, EBSCO and CNKI was carried out using the keywords 'Art Therapy', 'painting', 'emotion', 'psychological survey', 'psychological screening', 'Psychological consultation', 'crisis intervention', which were searched individually or in combination. A total of 25 articles were cited for review.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

THEORETICAL BASIS AND MECHANISM OF PAINTING ART THERAPY

The psychological theories on which the drawing test is based mainly include lateralisation theory of the brain and projection theory of the psychoanalytic school. Neurophysiologist

Sperry (1980) confirmed through research that the left hemisphere of the brain is responsible for abstract thinking and logical analysis while the right hemisphere is responsible for image thinking, perception and spatial positioning (Yan & Chen, 2016, p. 3). At the same time, studies on the damage to the right side of the brain in patients with schizophrenia have shown that damage to the function of the right hemisphere of the brain can affect people's emotional function. This finding shows that mental functions such as painting and emotion are all controlled by the right hemisphere of the brain.

Robin (1998), a master of painting art therapy, believes that most human thinking and psychological activities are visual (Yan & Chen, 2016, p. 4). Painting art therapy is a way for visitors to visualise their inner world with the help of painting to achieve the purpose of understanding and solving problems. Most humans experience emotions, but these are impossible to describe in words. Painting art therapy can release and express this unconsciousness to achieve the purpose of treatment. Painting itself is a value-neutral symbol that can reduce the defence of the visitor and express it more safely and smoothly. In painting art therapy, art creation and psychotherapy, inner conflict, emotion and desire are parallel and synchronised (Yan & Chen, 2016).

From Robin's point of view, it is not difficult to understand that the creative process of painting is a process of healing. The creative work of painting activates certain psychological processes. Compared with other psychological intervention methods, painting art therapy is conducive to building a relaxed and safe atmosphere, reducing the resistance and defence of the visitor, identify the concealed subconscious thoughts of the visitor and help the counsellor and the visitor establish a trusting relationship. At the same time, painting art therapy can present events at different times and places in the same work at the same time, express the inner conflicts of the visitors and help collect a wealth of information in a short time. The form of painting can also easily arouse the interest of visitors, is suitable for a wide range of people, simple to operate and takes a short time.

APPLICATION OF PAINTING ART THERAPY IN THE MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

At present, painting art therapy uses more painting forms in the mental health education of college students, including simple house paintings, tree paintings, self-portraits of people or group paintings of houses and trees, multidimensional addition paintings, random paintings, specific theme paintings and mandala. More complicated ones include dynamic analysis diagrams and nine square grids. The above painting forms and stages are not absolutely fixed combinations; the content of the application also ranges from psychological surveys, psychological screenings, psychological consultations and psychological crisis interventions to specific psychological problem interventions.

APPLICATION IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SCREENING AND SCREENING

Colleges and universities usually adopt psychological surveys of freshmen and regular psychological surveys of senior students to establish psychological files of college students, precisely target the objects of focus and provide basic information for the mental health education and crisis intervention of future college students. Traditional psychological screening and psychological screening are based on the 90-item self-rating symptom scale (SCL-90), the student personality questionnaire (UPI), the Cartel 16 personality factor questionnaire, the Eysenck personality questionnaire, Baker Depression Inventory, Baker Anxiety Inventory and other self-reporting questionnaires. However, because college students have a certain understanding of the purpose of the questionnaire and such scales are easily available on the Internet, some students do not want the school to know their true mental health

for various reasons. For these students with serious defensive psychology, it is easy to deliberately avoid real feelings and real answers, which reduces the validity of the questionnaire.

Zhao (2018) passed the HTP test in painting art therapy to students and cooperated with the UPI and SCL-90 tests. The positive rates of the three tests were 7.0%, 9.5% and 48.3%, respectively. The 21 positive people screened were all included in the positive population screened by SCL-90, which accounted for 81.0% of the positive people screened by UPI. The conclusion shows that the Fang Shuren test can effectively screen the psychological crisis groups of college students, and the use of UPI and SCL-90 can further narrow the screening range and improve the accuracy. Zhou (2020) used the Fang Shuren painting test twice at the beginning and middle of the year after the freshman enrolment to establish a dynamic painting psychological file of college students. Through a comparative analysis with the results of the self-reporting scale, he focused on the two test methods to screen students with inconsistent results. Circumstances, in-depth analysis and understanding of the reasons for the inconsistency made up for the deficiencies of the self-reporting questionnaires, and the exploratory methods and approaches that can more accurately screen out students who may have psychological problems have very important reference value (Zhou, 2020). Zhang Yan and others also carried out similar research in the freshman census and came to the same conclusion (Zhang, 2010).

Jiang Hongtao and others mentioned that Guangxi Medical University uses a combination of questionnaires and painting to integrate the content of painting art therapy into the freshman psychological survey chapter of the college students' mental health class. The university passes the Fang Shuren painting test auxiliary screening during the psychological consultation process. Identifying the people who need to be focused on has improved the positive screening rate of the focused subjects (Jiang et al., 2021). Yang Zaipan and others used painting art group tutoring to intervene in specific student groups. They tested the difference in the Hamilton Depression Scale scores before and after the intervention and qualitatively analysed the characteristics of the paintings. They found that the painting art group counselling had a significant effect on the relief of the students' depressive symptoms (Yang, 2014).

APPLICATION IN PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSULTATION AND CRISIS INTERVENTION

During the consultation process, painting art therapy can be used either as a standalone technique or the main treatment method. Gong Liqun's research explored the application of painting art therapy in college students' psychological counselling and counselling from two aspects: case counselling and group counselling. In the quantitative research results, 11 factors were identified, such as self-acceptance, self-flexibility, self-esteem and interpersonal sensitivity. The improvement is particularly obvious. Qualitative research shows that painting art group counselling can not only enhance the self-acceptance of members but also strengthen their sense of self-harmony, improve their level of self-esteem, promote their personality growth as a whole, improve their mental health and help members. Moreover, it can deepen understanding and the understanding of self, improve self-awareness and improve emotions. The results of the case study show that painting art therapy can effectively solve the common psychological distress of college students (Gong, 2008). After Xu Ying passed the Special Assessment Scale for Student Suicide and Crisis Potential Risks, the students who were suspected of having 'extremely high' potential psychological crisis risk were screened out and then the 'safe island', 'crossing the river map', 'people in the rain' or 'people in the rain' were screened. 'Mountain Climbing Picture' theme painting detects the current stress level and crisis situation of students, and finally, accurate crisis intervention measures are implemented through interviews (Xu, 2014).

APPLICATION IN IMPROVING SPECIFIC PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

As a psychological treatment method, painting art therapy has unique effects in processing emotions and cognitive functions, improving social function and self-esteem and improving clinical physical symptoms (Yan, 2011).

IMPROVING THE LEVEL OF EMOTIONAL FUNCTION PROBLEMS

Studies at home and abroad have shown that painting art therapy has a prominent role in dealing with emotional problems, especially in improving anxiety and depression. Forzoni et al. intervened in painting art therapy on 157 patients during chemotherapy and found that the therapy can help patients relieve anxiety, improve mood, express their true self-emotion and find new meaning in life (Forzoni, 2010). To study the effect of painting aesthetic therapy activities on the depression symptoms and overall mental health of college students, Tang Wanjie conducted three months of psychological counselling on painting aesthetic theme groups 10 times for 31 college students with different depression levels. The results showed that painting art therapy can effectively alleviate the depression of college students (Tang, 2008).

Shang Xiaoli and others proposed that painting art therapy can not only alleviate the emotional conflicts of students and adjust negative emotions but also inspire students to deal with inner conflicts with a positive attitude and experience pleasant emotions in group activities (Shang & Zhou, 2008). Studies by Niu Zhenhai and others have shown that painting art therapy can improve the quality of study and life of obese female college students and improve the depression of obese female college students. It is one of the effective ways to interfere with the depressive symptoms of obese female college students (Niu, 2011). The research of Cao Yunhua et al. showed that painting art therapy has a significant effect on promoting the mental health development of college students (Cao & Niu, 2011).

IMPROVING SOCIAL FUNCTIONING ISSUES SUCH AS INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

In his research, Liu Zhonghua from Ningbo University found that painting art intervention can improve the interpersonal relationship of left-behind children and is conducive to the improvement of their social functions (Liu, 2008). Similarly, college students can gain positive experiences in the collective painting process, such as improving their interpersonal skills in the process of constantly learning to introduce themselves and understand others.

IMPROVING SELF-EFFICACY

Wang Jiangyang and others pointed out that orphans have the self-estrangement characteristics of evading self-exploration, resulting in low self-worth and self-expectation and showing self-denial and autistic behaviour tendency (Wang & Li, 2017). Jiang Hongtao and others specially designed and implemented group counselling integrated with painting art therapy for orphans and other special groups of students. They found that painting art therapy has obvious effects in improving the negative state of the group's low self-efficacy, poor speech and sensitivity (Jiang et al., 2021).

IMPROVEMENT OF PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

In the clinical treatment research on painting psychotherapy at home and abroad, painting psychotherapy is often used in the treatment of schizophrenia (Phil et al., 2007), depression (Gussak, 2007), eating disorders (Kessler, 1994) and post-traumatic stress disorder (Brillantes-

Evangelista, 2013), among others. Most research reports on the treatment of schizophrenia believe that painting psychotherapy can alleviate the mental symptoms of patients with schizophrenia, promote their self-concept and improve their social functions (Yan & Chen, 2011). Yan Hu et al. showed that painting psychology technology has its unique application value in mental and psychological clinics. For example, it can relatively shorten the waiting time and help patients self-relieve and heal during their waiting process. The painting test is a kind of main observation test, which is inconsistent with traditional therapies. The combination of scale evaluation can comprehensively evaluate patients. The communication process carried out by painting works can promote the establishment of a good doctor–patient relationship and assist in mental health examinations (Yan, 2021). Kanareff conducted a 38-period bi-weekly group painting art intervention study on four children with autism and found that painting can effectively improve their social skills and improve their symptoms of loneliness (Kanareff, 2002). At the same time, numerous studies have shown that painting art therapy is also of great significance as an adjuvant treatment, such as cancer (Jones & Browning, 2009), patients with AIDS (Rao et al., 2009), children with asthma (Beebe et al., 2010) and other patients with physical anxiety symptoms and effects.

CONCLUSION

Painting art therapy has the advantages of a wide range of applications. It is simple in operation, takes up a short time and captures the interest of college students. In addition, participants will have greater self-awareness, more open minded and receptive to new ideas. New technology has the potential to create excitement for students to learn (Chee and Tan, 2021). Painting art therapy has inherent advantages in the process of mental health education for college students. Educators should be apt at guiding visitors to find positive inspiration from their paintings, instead of blindly ‘finding problems’ and blocking visitors. This therapy improves students’ psychological flexibility and hopes for the future. It addresses the students’ mental health growth. The original intention of painting art therapy is that only on this basis can psychological education be truly realised.

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