

Book Review

Art therapy with the eyes of specialists

Brigitta Bojtor¹

Recommended citation:

Bojtor, B. (2025). Art therapy with the eyes of specialists [Review of the book *Art therapy with special education students*, by D. Regev]. *Central European Journal of Educational Research*, 7(2), 168–170. <https://doi.org/10.37441/cej/2024/7/2/16472>

Bibliography of the reviewed book: Regev, D. (2023). *Art therapy with Special Education Students*. Routledge

Introduction

What impact could art therapy have on children with special educational needs? Dafna Regev's book provides a comprehensive, scientifically grounded answer to this question.

Beginning with the book's outer cover, the hand holding the brush emphasizes the process of art itself, rather than the finished product. This process illustrates clearly the essence of art therapy, which serves the purpose of self-expression rather than perfection. The vivid, flowing colors suggest energy, emotion, and possibilities. They indicate that art therapy is dynamic, expressive, and even therapeutic in a visual sense. The cover makes no explicit reference to special educational needs, but the abstract painting suggests openness and ambiguity, implying that art therapy can also reveal the hidden abilities of children with special educational needs. The clean, legible typography contrasts with the colorful painting in the background. This highlights the fact that art therapy must be creative, pedagogically sound, and practical at the same time.

The writer, Dafna Regev is an art therapist and a researcher. She is an associate professor, head of the art therapy program, and a member of the Emili Sagol Creative Arts Therapies Research Center at the University of Haifa, Israel. She has been interested in the connection between art therapy and the education system for a long time. Over the past few years, she has focused on working with her colleagues to explore the opinions of art therapists working in the education system and the issues that affect them. She has published numerous articles and books on art therapy, both for children and adults. An example of her work is the integration of art therapies into education. Her books are published by Routledge, one of the world's leading academic publishers in the humanities and social sciences. They publish thousands of books and journals each year, serving scholars, educators, and professional communities worldwide.

There are few publications or books across Central Europe that deal with similar topics. Mariana Lavric and Camelia Soponaru's book "Art Therapy and Social Emotional Development in Students with Special Educational Needs: Effects on Anxiety, Empathy, and Prosocial Behaviour" is similar to Dafna Regev's book, but Lavric and Soponaru place more emphasis on reducing anxiety, developing empathy, and promoting prosocial behavior, while Regev takes a different approach to art therapy, sometimes mentioning art itself as a form of therapy without including children with special educational needs, other times doing the opposite.

Review

In this book, eight chapters cover practical approaches, techniques, models, and methodologies that focus specifically on children with special educational needs, such as those with autism spectrum disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD), learning disabilities, behavioral disorders, and children with visual and hearing impairments. Each chapter presents a specific group, as well as an overview of the literature in this field and describing practices developed on the basis of interviews with experienced art therapists who specialize in working with that group. The chapters discuss the therapeutic goals, specific challenges, intervention techniques, and the significance of art for each group. The book includes art education methods developed in the field and collaborative interventions involving parents and school staff, as well as clinical illustrations to aid understanding.

¹ University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary; bojtorbrigitta@gmail.com

In the first chapter, we learn about children with attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD), who, in addition to learning difficulties, often struggle with emotional and social difficulties. For them, art therapy can be helpful primarily in improving their self-image and self-confidence, as well as in expressing their nonverbal emotions. Students can use different processing strategies to control their behavior while developing and strengthening their sense of control and regulation. One of the biggest challenges for students with ADHD is motivation and their limited attention span, which also affects their persistence in the creative process. For example, Maor, referring to his research at the turn of the millennium, emphasizes that cutting, kneading, pressing, and working with various drawing tools can improve graphomotor performance and eye-hand coordination.

To laymen, hearing-impaired people appear to be a homogeneous group, but the second chapter of the book points out that this is a diverse population. Regev draws attention to the fact that in the case of deaf and hard of hearing people (D/HH), development should start from the premise that their main difficulty is effective verbal communication. The art therapist must find a way to connect with the children, in which eye contact and facial expressions play an important role. The biggest challenge is the smooth communication between the therapist and the children, during which the art therapist must bridge the differences. Since abstract thinking is very difficult for these students, therefore working on a collage is improving their sentence construction. In both cases, there are parts from which the whole can be built. The art therapist also described how selecting objects in different newspapers can help the children focus on their desires.

As in the case of hearing-impaired children, many people believe that it is almost impossible to use art therapy with visually impaired children (B/SVI). In the third chapter, Dafna Regev discusses how diverse the group of visually impaired people is, similar to that of hearing-impaired people. The first and most important thing is to understand the nature of the children's visual impairment and then develop appropriate therapeutic goals. Since they cannot rely on their vision, the art therapist must turn to their other senses. With this and the help of art materials, children are able to express their personal experiences. What is the most important goal for the visually impaired? All interviewed art therapists mentioned living independently and thus they emphasized a focus on independent behavior in the art therapy room. In order to help them gain that freedom, a development-oriented approach is needed that is sensitive to the changing needs of dependence and independence. The clay workshop and the use of adhesives and stickers can all help students express their true selves through art.

In the fourth chapter, author Stephen Shore's aphorism, "if you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism," is put forward (Regev, 2023, p.62). In this section, Dafna Regev discusses autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This is a complex phenomenon that manifests itself differently in each person, with the spectrum covering a wide range. Since every autistic child is different, each must be treated differently. In addition to general characteristics, each student's communication patterns, interests, and emotional difficulties must also be examined in depth. Art therapy helps with behavior, perception, and emotional expression. With the help of art, students can begin to depict their experiences and recount their personal experiences. Interventions can be divided into three main groups. The first group includes interventions aimed at helping the student. What should we do if a child with autism spectrum disorder is hypo-sensitive or hyper-sensitive to touch? In such cases, it may be helpful to explore materials indirectly, for example through a plastic bag. The second group includes interventions aimed at helping students tell their own stories. With the help of comics or visual diaries, they can give shape to these experiences. The third group includes interventions aimed at improving students communication and interaction with their immediate environment. This can be achieved through joint drawings sessions, an open studio, or group work.

Children with intellectual disabilities face cognitive, emotional, and functional challenges and must overcome their limitations through art. In Chapter five, we learn about the methods art therapists use to help children with intellectual disabilities express themselves. In many cases, art therapists also encounter difficulties. Art therapy for children with intellectual disabilities is a slow process, with changes occurring gradually and incrementally. Some art therapists believe that a slow, non-judgmental environment is necessary for creative processes to develop, while others have recommended a wide range of interventions. This includes, for example, the use of mobile phones as an alternative form of supportive communication. Therapists also use mobile phones to learn about the students' world. In this case, students show what music or videos they are interested in, so that the art therapist can get to know their tastes better.

Perhaps the most interesting parts are the last three chapters of the book, which discuss art therapy for patients struggling with behavioral disorders, hospitalized patients, and children with mental disorders. The biggest challenge in the art therapy development of children with behavioral disorders is that they must be kept

under control, both physically and emotionally, by the therapist. The diversity of children is also present here, which must be adapted to and accepted. An art therapist said that over the years, she has identified two groups among these children. One group consists of students who constantly explode, harass others, lose self-control, and get into trouble. The other group is comprised of very sensitive, anxious students who are eager to learn but do not really understand why they are in a special school. For children, the act of grasping, kneading, and touching helps them regulate their senses, emotions, and behavior. Some art therapists also mention tools and materials that they would give to students without restriction, such as hammers or nails.

Therapy with children hospitalized for various health problems is unique and differs from all previous chapters. For them, the main goal is to regain control over their own bodies, to distract their attention, and to express and process trauma. In this case, the challenge and the goal are different for the children. The selection of materials, artistic endeavors, and the active nature of the work, such as cutting, arranging, designing, gluing, and creating something tangible, allow these children to experience themselves as active and skilled creators, as opposed to feeling like victims of their illness or passive, helpless patients.

Several important goals have been outlined for art therapy for children with mental disorders. The first and most important is to help them choose life and to express themselves and their inner world. Most therapists use a dynamic approach in this case as well. In the case of children with eating disorders, for example, art therapists sometimes recommend dealing directly with self-image and body image. An art therapist working in a closed ward described how children sometimes have to overcome their resistance before they will go into the art therapy room. All therapists use open and dynamic methods. They encourage students to work freely and sometimes introduce new materials to expand the students' repertoire.

Conclusion

We can see that each chapter deals with different groups of children. Each group is different and requires not only time, perseverance, and patience, but also the special expertise of therapists. Dafna Regev has created a unique and groundbreaking book by summarizing the experiences of professionals in her interview-based research involving numerous Israeli art therapists. After clarifying the developmental goals and possibilities, we learned a wealth of useful advice and examples for the development of different groups of children. The author herself communicates through the book that her goal is not to prove the effectiveness of art therapy through control group studies, but to show what art therapy can mean for students with different special needs. Regev's style throughout the book is professional yet practical, his arguments are practical and empirical, based not only on abstract theories but also on the experience of professionals and clinical practice. This helps to make the book useful in everyday practice, not just as theoretical reading, with the emphasis always on support and self-expression. As the book is mainly qualitative, it does not provide quantitative evidence that art therapy is effective in all cases. This can make it difficult to generalize, as what one therapist describes may not necessarily work in another context. The adaptability of the methods is questionable because what works in a certain environment in Israel may not work in other countries or school structures. Despite these limitations, the book is useful, applicable, and provides guidance on what methods teachers or parents should use with children with different special educational needs. I recommend this book to any professional or lay person interested in art therapy as an alternative method of development for students with special educational needs.

Acknowledgement: We thank Johnathan Dabney for the English language editing.



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