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ART THERAPY AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS OF LEARNERS IN AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

The article examines the issue of developing interpersonal relationships among learners in an inclusive educational environment through the use of art therapy technologies. An analysis of contemporary scientific approaches to understanding the essence of art therapy, its types, psychological and pedagogical mechanisms of influence, and its practical potential in the development of communicative competence, empathy, cooperation, and social adaptation of learners is presented.

It is substantiated that the systematic use of art therapy contributes to the reduction of communication barriers, strengthens positive interaction, promotes the formation of humanistic relationships, and fosters the development of an inclusive culture within the educational environment. It has been established that art therapy is an effective means of psychological and pedagogical support for learners with diverse educational needs.

Keywords: art therapy, interpersonal relationships, inclusive education, communication skills, social adaptation, learners with special educational needs, psychological and pedagogical support.

The modern development of inclusive education is aimed at creating equal educational opportunities for all categories of learners, including children with psychophysical developmental characteristics, speech impairments, cognitive, sensory, emotional-volitional, and motor limitations [1]. At the same time, the success of inclusion is determined not only by the accessibility of the educational environment but also by the quality of interpersonal relationships formed within the student community. The level of social inclusion, acceptance, cooperation, and communicative success is one of the key indicators of the effectiveness of the inclusive education model [2].

Practice shows that children with special educational needs often face difficulties in social integration, communication limitations, reduced social status within peer groups, challenges in establishing contacts, and an increased risk of social isolation [3]. Therefore, the issue of developing positive interpersonal relationships among learners has acquired particular scientific and practical significance.

One of the most promising approaches to addressing this issue is the use of art therapy as a means of psychological and pedagogical support. Art therapy is a system of methods based on the use of various forms of artistic and creative activities aimed at harmonizing emotional states, promoting personal development, fostering communicative competence, and enhancing social adaptation [4].

The scientific foundations of art therapy were established in the works of Margaret Naumburg, Edith Kramer, A.I. Kopytin, and L.D. Lebedeva, who regarded artistic creativity as an effective

tool for emotional self-expression, correction of internal experiences, and personality development [5]. In contemporary educational practice, art therapy is viewed not only as a corrective method but also as an educational resource that promotes cooperation, empathy, initiative, and positive interaction.

Art therapy gains particular importance in inclusive education because it enables interaction among children regardless of their level of speech, intellectual, or physical development. The use of creativity as a universal language of interaction reduces the influence of speech and cognitive barriers, creates an emotionally safe communication space, and facilitates the more natural formation of interpersonal relationships [6].

Modern types of art therapy include:

• Art therapy through visual arts (isotherapy);
• Music therapy;
• Fairy-tale therapy;
• Drama therapy;
• Sand therapy;
• Dance and movement therapy.

Each of these approaches possesses its own corrective and developmental potential; however, the most significant effect is achieved through their integrated application.

Visual art therapy promotes joint planning, discussion, role distribution, and cooperation during collective artistic activities. Music therapy facilitates emotional contact, synchronization of actions, and group cohesion. Fairy-tale therapy and drama therapy contribute to the development of empathy, understanding of social roles, modeling of communication situations, and mastery of interaction norms. Sand therapy creates conditions for safe symbolic interaction and emotional self-expression [7].

The psychological and pedagogical mechanism of art therapy is based on several interconnected processes. First, art therapy contributes to emotional regulation, reducing anxiety, internal tension, and fear of communication. Second, collaborative creative activities foster communicative activity, initiative, and the ability to cooperate. Third, art therapy develops empathy and emotional responsiveness, which are particularly important for building humanistic relationships in an inclusive environment. Fourth, successful participation in collective activities strengthens a child's positive self-esteem and social status [8].

Recent studies confirm that the systematic implementation of art therapy programs contributes to:

• Development of communication skills;
• Reduction of conflicts;
• Strengthening of group cohesion;
• Formation of cooperation skills;
• Development of emotional competence;
• Improvement of social adaptation [9].

Particularly effective are group art practices, including collaborative drawing, joint art projects, theatrical performances, music and rhythmic activities, and play-based art programs. These forms of activity create conditions for equal participation, allow every child to express themselves, and help break down social barriers between children with different educational opportunities [10].

An important condition for the successful application of art therapy is its systematic integration into the educational process. Effectiveness is achieved under the following conditions:

• Regularity of sessions;
• Individualization of content;
• Interdisciplinary support;
• Creation of an emotionally safe environment;
• Active involvement of the teacher;
• Family participation;
• Reflective support for learners [11].

It should be emphasized that the role of the teacher in the art therapy process extends beyond traditional instruction. The teacher acts as a facilitator who organizes interaction, maintains a positive emotional climate, regulates group dynamics, and promotes the development of constructive interpersonal relationships [12].

Thus, art therapy is a scientifically grounded and practically effective means of developing interpersonal relationships among learners in inclusive educational settings. Its application contributes to the formation of communicative competence, the development of empathy, the strengthening of positive interaction, the enhancement of social adaptation, and the creation of a humanistic inclusive environment.

Therefore, the systematic implementation of art therapy technologies in educational practice should be considered one of the priority directions for improving psychological and pedagogical support for learners, ensuring successful socialization, personal development, and the full integration of children into modern society.

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