

Therapeutic Preferences of Arts Therapists in Educational Environments – A Cross-Sectional Study in the Czech Republic

DOI: 10.15804/tner.2021.64.2.06

Abstract

A growing number of arts therapists around the world work in schools, but information on their practices is limited. The aim of this work is to examine the theoretical influences and therapeutic trends prevalent in Czech educational institutions. Data obtained from 142 respondents were collected using the “Practice of Arts Therapies” questionnaire. Based on a statistical analysis of the responses, the results show that therapists prefer predominantly humanistic trends with a wide range of other therapeutic influences based on assimilative integration tendencies. Contrary to the initial assumptions, it was found that there is little difference in the preferences for trends in different work environments. The results can be used for international comparisons of arts therapies in the educational environment, as they seem to be an important area of interdisciplinary practice associated with education.

Key words: *arts, therapy, education, schools, special needs*

Introduction

The changing social climate is bringing new problems to schools: the heterogeneity of pupils in the educational environment is increasing, it is necessary to respond to a number of negative societal forces, etc. (Karkou, 2010). Arts therapies (AT) and their respective fields – art therapy, music therapy, drama therapy or

dance/movement therapy – offer solutions to many of these problems, having been established in many schools around the world as so-called auxiliary services. With the growing importance of AT in schools, there is a need to examine the unique characteristics of AT in regard to their implementation in the educational environment.

From the very beginning, in the Czech schools, interest in AT has been associated mainly with pupils with special educational needs (SEN). In the 1980s there was a rise in interest in art therapy, in the 1990s a rise in interest in music therapy and drama therapy, and now dance/movement therapists are also starting to work in schools. Pupils with more serious educational problems have traditionally been educated in special schools, where ATs have been developed as part of comprehensive rehabilitation (Olejníčková, Kantor, Maštališ, Valenta, & Růžička, 2019). In the 1990s, integration and later inclusive trends began to transform the education system, which led to an increase in pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. These changes were further strengthened by the Education Act of 2016. Although AT is not a state-regulated profession in the Czech Republic, it is practiced in schools by a number of special pedagogues and psychologists. Education in AT can be obtained in the Czech Republic through several private and postgraduate courses, and there are also university programs in the field of art therapy (Faculty of Education, University of South Bohemia), drama therapy, and music therapy (Faculty of Education, Palacky University).

Problem of Research

AT in the educational environment is strongly influenced by learning theories, by the specifics of individual groups of students, and by the requirements and problems associated with a particular institution (Karkou, 2010). This creates a new AT identity that has not been sufficiently researched internationally. ATs bring to schools a variety of strategies for therapeutic, counseling and socially-oriented interventions. Specialized AT programs have been published in the literature focused on serious educational problems and pupils with SEN (Andreas, 2005; Rickson, 2006), prevention of social risk phenomena (Quibell, 2010), support of adaptive behavior (Łaba-Hornecka, 2017), integration of pupils from immigrant and refugee families (Rousseau, Sing, Lacroix, Bagilishya, & Measham, 2004), victims of terrorism and traumatic events (Gelkopf & Berger, 2008), etc.

Some authors state that working in the educational environment shapes the therapeutic orientation of arts therapists. V. Karkou & P. Sanderson (2006), in their analysis of the practice of arts therapists, observed that the preferred therapeutic trends in educational institutions were humanistic (pupil-oriented), develop-

mental, active / directive (e.g., behavioral and training-oriented approaches) and artistic / creative. K. McFerran (2010) analyzed the theoretical influences of music therapy approaches in schools based on literature published in English. According to her analysis, the dominant theoretical approaches were psychodynamic (52%), humanistic (44%) and behavioral (12%). A recent review of therapeutic trends (Ludíková, 2017) found that arts therapists in schools use a wide range of therapeutic trends, which in addition to the above also include neurorehabilitation (e.g., neurological music therapy), community (e.g., community music therapy or community-based art therapy), instructional (based on pedagogical concepts, e.g., from Orff, *s Schulwerk*) and other approaches. In addition, ATs have important overlaps with other disciplines, especially arts education, therapeutic arts, and art-based pedagogy (Ayers, 2016).

Methodology of Research

General Background of Research

The aim of this study was to identify therapeutic preferences used by arts therapists in educational institutions in the Czech Republic and to determine whether these preferences differ from other work environments. The research used the design of a cross-sectional study with the questionnaire “The Practice of Art Therapies” (Karkou & Sanderson, 2006), which was created in Great Britain and later applied in national surveys in Latvia (Paica, Martinsone, & Karkou, 2013) and in Russia (Karkou et al., 2011). The questionnaire was translated into Czech independently by two professional translators; the translation was consulted with V. Karkou and then finalized by one of the authors of the study.

Instrument and Procedures

The questionnaire consists of five parts and contains general information about the respondents’ practices, their biographical information, theoretical influences, therapeutic principles, assessment and evaluation. For the purposes of this study, the authors used the analysis of questionnaire items related to the respondents’ work environment, preferences for theoretical influences, therapeutic trends, and general information about the respondents. The theoretical influences were defined by V. Karkou and P. Sanderson (2006) as important psychological, psychotherapeutic, artistic and other theories, while therapeutic principles are considered to be statements that characterize the theoretical framework of the therapeutic process. The questionnaire in the Czech version was modified only with regard

to the items that relate to the qualification in AT due to the specifics of the Czech environment.

Data Analysis

While most items of the questionnaire are of a nominal nature and were analyzed using descriptive statistics, therapeutic principles were examined through preferences for statements on Likert scales and analyzed by t-test at a significance level of $p = 0.05$ (using STATISTICA 12). Respondents were divided into two subgroups: therapists from educational institutions and other therapists. For therapeutic principles, the internal consistency of the data (Cronbach's alpha) was calculated to evaluate the validity and reliability of the conclusions.

Sample of Research

The exact number of practicing arts therapists in the Czech Republic is unknown. The latest known statistics are from January 2017, when professional associations of the respective AT fields registered a total of 419 therapists (210 music therapists, 153 art therapists, 39 dance/movement therapists and 17 drama therapists). However, it should be noted that the members may not be practicing therapists, and there are many practicing therapists not enrolled in any of the associations. To address as many practicing arts therapists as possible, a combination of the deliberate selection of respondents from professional associations and their recommendations for therapists who perform their practice outside of the associations was used. This approach made it possible to form a balanced research set.

For the purposes of statistical analysis, the resulting set of 142 respondents was divided into two sub-sets according to the work environment reported by the respondents (sub-set of respondents with experience in educational institutions and sub-set of those working elsewhere). The relative frequencies in parentheses in Table 1 express the ratio with respect to subsets by work environment.

Table 1. Prevalence of AT modalities by work environment

Modality of AT	Educational institutions	Other
Music therapy	20 (40 %)	30 (60%)
Art therapy	14 (36.8%)	24 (63.2%)
Dramatherapy	2 (22.2%)	7 (77.8%)
Dance/movement therapy	1 (11.1%)	8 (88.9%)
Expressive arts therapy	14 (38.8%)	22 (61.1%)
Total	51 (100%)	91 (100%)

The qualifications of the respondents in the respective type of work environment are given in Table 2. Due to the lower expected number of respondents, students of long-term educational programs in AT were also included in the research group, provided that they had more than one year of therapeutic experience. During the preparation of data for analysis, six questionnaires were excluded because their respondents did not meet the inclusion criteria: specialization in at least one main direction of AT, experience in the Czech Republic, and qualifications in AT.

Table 2. Respondents' qualifications by their work environment

Work environment	Fully qualified therapists	Participants in training programmes	Other specialists using AT
Educational institutions	18 (35.3%)	5 (9.8%)	27 (52.9%)
Other institutions	36 (39.2%)	22 (24.2%)	34 (37.4%)
Entire sample	54 (37.7%)	27 (19%)	61 (43%)

Participation in the research was anonymous, voluntary, and participants were informed of the research objectives in the header of the questionnaire. Anonymity was maintained throughout the process of analyzing and publishing the results.

Results of Research

The most common therapeutic influences in educational institutions included specific AT traditions (e.g., a holistic music therapy approach), an integrative approach, developmental theories, specific artistic traditions (e.g., modern dance schools), etc. (Table 3) On the other hand, the lowest preferences were given to specific psychoanalytic / psychodynamic theories. Due to the highest preferences for specific AT traditions, it seems that training in a specific method remains popular among therapists. A comparison of arts therapists in educational institutions with arts therapists in other work environments showed only a few minor differences: an unexpected discrepancy in the higher prevalence of transactional analysis or gestalt theories in educational institutions.

Based on the open question contained in this part of the questionnaire, it was possible to identify some theoretical influences specific to Czech arts therapists. Several respondents from the group of educational institutions stated that they

Table 3. Analysis of theoretical influences of arts therapists – a multiple-choice item (n = 468 responses)

Theoretical influences	Entire sample	Educational institutions	Other
Specific traditions of AT	59 (41.5%)	23 (13.4 %)	36 (12.2%)
Integrative approach	56 (39.4%)	21 (12.2%)	35 (11.8%)
Developmental theories	53 (37.3%)	20 (11.6%)	33 (11.1%)
Psychodynamic theory	41 (28.9%)	16 (9.3%)	25 (8.4%)
Specific artistic traditions	37 (26.1%)	17 (9.9%)	20 (6.8%)
Attachment theory	30 (21.1%)	9 (5.2%)	21 (7.1%)
Jungian symbolic theory	28 (19.7%)	10 (5.8%)	18 (6.1%)
Areas that have so far not been theoretically formulated	27 (19%)	10 (5.8%)	17 (5.7%)
Play therapy theory	25 (17.6%)	8 (4.7%)	17 (5.7%)
Psychoanalytic theory	23 (16.2 %)	7 (4.1%)	16 (5.4%)
Gestalt	21 (14.8%)	9 (5.2%)	12 (4%)
Eclectic approach	20 (14.1%)	4 (2.3%)	16 (5.4%)
Group analytic theory	18 (12.7%)	3 (1.7%)	15 (5.1%)
Object relations theory	10 (7%)	4 (2.3%)	6 (2%)
Transactional analysis	10 (7%)	7 (4.1%)	3 (1%)
D. Winnicott's theory	7 (4.9%)	3 (1.7%)	4 (1.4%)
Kleinian theory	2 (1.4%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.3%)
Kelly's personal construct theory	1 (0.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.3%)

use various influences from the pedagogical field, such as principles based on alternative pedagogy (Montessori or Waldorf pedagogy) or from therapeutic pedagogy. Some respondents emphasized the focus on the healthy personality aspects of the pupils they are trying to promote. Other respondents from educational institutions describe therapeutic approaches and influences such as developmental changes, biosynthesis, musical traditions of various non-European cultures, or theories of psychosomatic medicine. Respondents also reported several therapeutic approaches that have not yet been described in the literature, such as physio-musical stimulation.

From the point of view of therapeutic principles, arts therapists from educational institutions were most characterized by humanistic principles. Less preferred were artistic / creative, active / directive, eclectic / integrative and developmental princi-

ples (the average scores of these principles were very similar). The least important were the psychoanalytic / psychodynamic principles.

In the next phase, the preferences of the therapeutic principles and their comparison in both subgroups were tested using a t-test. Based on previous findings (Karkou & Sanderson, 2006), we expected differences between the two subgroups, which we expected to be reflected as a higher preference for humanistic (student-oriented), developmental, active / directive and artistic / creative principles in those from educational settings. Overall, the statistical differences between the two types of work environments were not assessed as significant, however, lower preferences for eclectic / integrative and artistic / creative principles were observed among arts therapists from educational institutions (see Table 4).

Table 4. Relationship between art therapists' work environment (educational institutions and other types of work environments) and therapeutic principles

Therapeutic principles	Educational institutions	Other	P
Therapeutic principles	51	91	
Total (n)	4.325	4.289	0.635
Humanistic therapeutic approach – average score	0.463	0.416	
Humanistic therapeutic approach – standard deviation	3.216	3.364	0.292
Psychoanalytical/psychodynamic therapeutic approach – average score	0.842	0.783	
Psychoanalytical/psychodynamic therapeutic approach – standard deviation	3.675	3.508	0.222
Developmental therapeutic approach – average score	0.762	0.785	
Developmental therapeutic approach – standard deviation	3.765	3.980	0.034
Artistic/creative therapeutic approach – average score	0.661	0.521	
Artistic/creative therapeutic approach – standard deviation	3.761	3.949	0.056
Active/directive therapeutic approach – average score	0.632	0.513	
Active/directive therapeutic approach – standard deviation	3.729	3.960	0.045
Eclectic/integrative therapeutic approach – average score	0.749	0.593	

Discussion

Art therapists in educational institutions can be characterized by humanistic therapeutic trends. One possible interpretation is associated with the noticeable impact of the student-centered approach, which is popular among many arts

therapists and special educators (Karkou, 1999) and which is philosophically rooted in humanistic thinking. On the other hand, other therapeutic principles have a comparable degree of significance (slightly lower than humanistic ones), while psychoanalytic / psychodynamic principles have the lowest preferences. This result very closely reflects the characteristics of the community of arts therapists in the Czech Republic, including in other work environments (Kantor, Chráska, & Ludíková, 2019). The most preferred principles among the respondents from the Czech Republic are similar to the results of the original survey in Great Britain (Karkou & Sanderson, 2006), while the least preferred principles are similar to the results of the survey in Latvia (Paica, Martinsone, & Karkou, 2013). When comparing educational and other institutions, only partial differences in artistic / creative and eclectic / integration principles are evident. This statistical difference is different from the original findings of V. Karkou and P. Sanderson (2006), although both sets appear to have many similar characteristics (e.g., the most numerous preferences for humanistic principles).

In the analysis of theoretical influences, respondents most preferred specific traditions of AT. This means that training in a specific method is still popular among therapists. At the same time, there is a high preference for an integration approach. This practice is sometimes called assimilation integration – based on specific theoretical orientations, various techniques are used and assimilated in a way that is beneficial to the student (Carere-Comes, 2020). On the other hand, it is surprising that the open questions did not reflect influences that are characteristic of the Czech AT community, such as body-oriented therapy (represented in the sample only by isolated statements about biosynthesis). This could be due to the method of sample selection or to omitting some important information on the part of the respondents, e.g., due to lack of time.

Given the results of the survey, it seems that in the Czech environment there is potential for enriching AT with approaches that have not yet been theoretically formulated and published. Some respondents from educational institutions noted that they used a theoretical framework based on the principles of various pedagogical theories. This assimilation of educational theories into therapeutic practice is another example of the influence of the educational environment on AT. An example of this trend is the close connection between Waldorf schools and anthroposophical art therapies (Intveen & Clark, 2016). The focus on positive, healthy aspects of pupils' personalities is in line with the context of the educational environment (Hayes, 2016).

In the discussion, several options were suggested for interpreting the results of the statistical analysis of the differences between the educational / other work

environment, especially those results that were in contrast to the prior assumptions. We reflected on why there were only partially significant differences that are difficult to interpret. An increased focus on developmental, artistic / creative or active / directive principles would be logical in an educational environment, not the other way around. The small (and difficult to predict) impact of the work environment may be related to the following causes:

- Limited selection of educational opportunities in AT in the Czech Republic.
- Therapists often work in several types of institutions simultaneously (part-time) and their main work environment often changes.
- The development of AT in the Czech Republic is chaotic rather than predictable. In the 1990s, many opportunities arose for the development of AT, but without a clear direction or set rules. There are also other specific demographic, historical, cultural, social and political conditions that may have influenced the development of AT.

Based on the results of this study, further considerations for practice and research in AT can be suggested:

- It would be useful to expand some items in 'The Practice of Arts Therapies' questionnaire to incorporate newer theoretical influences and therapeutic principles, e.g., in the area of systemic approaches or body-oriented therapies. Some items should be clarified – for example, in the item on full qualifications in AT, we assumed that respondents answered according to the professional standards of associations, but that was not explicitly stated.
- At the level of professional associations, a conceptual plan for the development of AT in educational institutions could be created and implemented in practice. Some of the ideas that emerged from this research focus on expanding the training of arts therapists in educational institutions, e.g., by implementing approaches from abroad toward AT that are typical for the environment of educational institutions abroad with the Czech therapeutic community, etc.
- Explore other aspects of therapeutic practice from the perspective of the work environment.

Given that this is the first national AT survey in the Czech Republic and the local community of arts therapists is rather fragmented, it would be useful to repeat data collection in a few years. In order to raise artists' awareness of the importance of this research, members of professional associations were informed of the conclusions and the results were presented at several annual meetings and professional congresses.

Study reflection

The strength of the study is the use of a questionnaire, the items of which were based on extensive empirical research conducted in the United Kingdom and tested in subsequent national studies. In addition, the internal consistency of the data was calculated for all scale items (Table 5). The calculated Cronbach's alpha has a higher value compared to the results of previous studies from Great Britain (Karkou & Sanderson, 2006) or Latvia (Karkou, Martinsone, Nazarova, & Vaverniece, 2011).

Table 5. Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of arithmetic mean values "of the responses concerning therapeutic principles

	Therapeutic principle					
	Human- istic	Psychoan- alytical/ psychody- namic	Develop- mental	Artistic/ creative	Active/ directive	Eclectic/ integrative
Cronbach's alpha (Great Britain)	0.59	0.65	0.65	0.53	0.50	0.66
Cronbach's alpha (Latvia)	0.55	0.50	0.50	0.59	0.69	0.54
Cronbach's alpha (Czech Republic)	0.63	0.80	0.80	0.64	0.61	0.69

The weak point of the study was the number of respondents. The criteria for inclusion in the research set could not reach the same level of validity as was possible in countries with clear legislative rules for AT (UK, Latvia, Estonia, etc.). The questionnaire would require an update (despite its undeniable advantages) for further surveys to take into account the current concept of AT practice.

Conclusions

Arts therapists working in Czech educational institutions prefer mainly humanistic trends with a wide range of other therapeutic influences based on assimilative integration tendencies. This finding reflects the close relationship

between arts therapies, the student-centered approach, and various pedagogical disciplines, such as special education. Specific theories influence the practices of arts therapists, but these influences are not significant when comparing major trends in educational and other work environments. Based on the information obtained from the analysis of therapeutic preferences, similarities can be found between the practices of arts therapists in the Czech Republic and in some other European countries. The results of this study can be used to create strategies for the systematic development of AT in the Czech educational environment and for the implementation of future comparative studies in arts therapies.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded by Faculty of Education, Palacký University in Olomouc, IGA_2019_004—Výzkum muzikoterapie v oblasti rozvoje osob se speciálními potřebami (Research of music therapy in the development of persons with special needs).

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