



Arts

TOUCHES OF ART TO DISABLED LIVES: TEXTILE ART AND BLIND PEOPLE

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Abstract

The relationship between art and disease is a subject that has been studied for centuries. Artistic activities are used therapeutically to distract attention and to move away from the focused health problem. In addition to reducing symptoms such as pain, it is also used in the rehabilitation and therapy of individuals with long-term health problems. Among the current therapeutic approaches, textile arts are actually both old and very new methods. This study has been prepared in order to express the importance of fine arts and textile art for disabled and especially visually impaired individuals. Textile arts are considered as a different and distinguished way for the visually impaired in terms of rehabilitation, therapy, improving the quality of life and acquiring modern occupations.

Keywords: Touches; Disabled; Textile Art.

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1. Introduction

Art Therapy and Disabilities

Providing social integration of persons with disabilities is important for both the individual and society. These people should be motivated in order to get them into the workforce and social life. For those people with disabilities who are an undeniable part of the society many different methods like giving them a sense of self-confidence, a sense of self, and providing autonomy are being used for years. Artistic activities are among the most important ways to provide a combination of sense and reason.

The first traces of art, which was developed through various steps from the dawn of mankind, can be seen in cave paintings (1). Arts and crafts were born not out of intention but of the need for easing the conditions of living and for expressing the difficulties of it. Humans conveyed their fears and joys through cave paintings. Then they used the skins of their prey for covering themselves up, and their teeth and horns for protection and according to their religious beliefs by

painting these in different colours with the natural dyes. They also made accessories with these. Along with physical needs, fine arts began to be used as a means for therapy, first with music. Therapy with music is one of the oldest methods, used since about 4,000 years in various cultures. While Ancient Greeks saw the music as the root of all virtues, and in Ancient Rome it was believed to calm the soul and heal the maladies related to the soul. For therapy with music the great Chinese philosopher Confucius drew attention on the topic by saying, “When the music is made relationships heal, eyes shine, ears sharpen and the flow of blood calms down” (2).

2. Textile Art and Using in Therapy

Another branch of fine arts used successfully for therapy, is the textile art. It is quite possible to say that there is an unbreakable bond between man and the textiles. The textile art is defined as obtaining surfaces from any kind of fibre by using various methods (knitting, weaving, etc.) (3). Textiles require the use of colours, materials and different techniques according to the individual's touch & feel and the given object's method of production. The use of hands along with senses in textile art provide individuals benefits such as joy, confidence, dealing with symptoms of sickness, arranging their lives, reducing social anxieties of minority groups, forming a satisfactory new identity, autonomy, rise in the quality of life, filling the professional void after retirement and socialisation, and self-expressing for people with disabilities. It is also reported the textile art possess qualities promoting personal development, and easing formal and informal learning (4).

Also observed are the healing effects of textile art on multiple sclerosis, arthritis, spinal problems, cancers, migraine, eyesight problems, depression, chronic fatigue syndrome, myalgic encephalopathy, chronic diseases, and people with disabilities, psychiatric diseases and the problem of criminal tendency (3,5-8).

As a result of studies, the reduction of depression and general anxiety along with anxiety for the future, and development of good feelings (joy, contentment), rise in optimism, self-respect, motivation, and also better dealing with symptoms were reported. Also effects like gaining social support, using time efficiently, keeping hope, accepting the disease and living with it, getting social visibility, contributing family budget are reported for those who suffer cancer and other chronic diseases (5).

Textile art, through its evolutionary development, affected many people with its healing role. During its evolutionary process, while works on tapestry going on everywhere in the world on, one hand, production of three-dimensional forms and various surfaces through weaving and other free techniques began, and a new, interdisciplinary area of art emerged under the name of fibre art or artistic textiles. Artists added design objects into the art by taking them off the mundane context and adding new meanings for artistic expression (9). In that era textiles were used in many artistic disciplines either as a material or a means for expression, and textiles, accepted as an art with the effects of modern currents in art in the second half of 20th Century, kept forming feelings and energies for those who touch them (8).

While almost all forms of fine arts are being used as a means of rehabilitation on people, the blind are among the hardest to adapt the work for textile art. The difficulties for the blind are of course the combination of colour, texture, and design, which are necessities for textile art. That may be

the reason why the devices carrying the detection machinery to provide location of the physical obstacles around, outfits with braille, luminous garments and other signalling devices were developed (10,11).

The scarcity of works and workshops on textile art and design for the blind points out to a need for the development in this area.

It is necessary to work extensively for the betterment of life through art, for any type of disability. The physical closeness of artistic textiles and their ability to convey expression are important in materialising the shared experience and bringing special talents out. Goethe said: “Ear is mute, mouth is deaf but eye can both hear and talk.” The eyesight is very important, thus its loss brings many psychological problems (12). The necessity of giving those people skills and knowledge others have, and also changing the living environment according to their needs in order to avoid the disability became an obstacle was emphasised in many different literatures.

Art therapists and experts of mental health used sewing and textile materials to help people tell their stories artistically, especially where culturally appropriate (13,14). It is necessary to form bonds between the methods of application and the individuals, to strengthen their attachment to life, to use happy touches in entering into their lives.

Many blind and famous musicians, sculptors, and painters prove to us that they have strong inspirations to create their works. Worldwide known blind painter Eşref Armağan said: “I can see the world through my fingertips”(15). The late blind bard of Turkey, Âşık Veysel refused an operation offer from his doctor who claimed he can open his eyes by saying “I am scared I won’t be able to write my poems if you do so.” There are many examples like that, and getting these vulnerable people close to art therapies, helping them to design and produce, and even market stuff for those like them is very important for both their mental health and peace in society. This study aims to explore and reveal the healing effects of fine arts, and especially textile art on blind people, and also on other people with health problems.

3. Results and Recommendations

Feelings to beneficial herself and people is another source of healing motivation for people with disabilities. Textile art provides rich products with materials that people with disabilities in almost every society can easily access.

It is important for policy makers and non-governmental organizations to take more active roles in order to provide opportunities for producers with disabilities both during the promotion and marketing of these products.

Textile arts academicians sharing their knowledge and skills with blind people will accelerate and ease these people’s integration into society. It is believed that innovative work through textile art would benefit this group by providing self-confidence, motivation, status, economic independence, and also good examples of practice in the name of social responsibility.

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