

# USING ART AS THERAPY FOR YOUNG CHILDREN EXPERIENCING TRAUMATIC EVENTS

(An Overview for Aceh Early Childhood Education Curriculum Development)

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## ABSTRACT

Art therapy is a process of therapy which is using art as the recovery tool. Art therapy focus solely on its therapeutic process not on the end result of art product. Art therapy directly connect with all development stages of a child. They are using their physic to express their affection/empathy or anger toward their surroundings. In the process, they are applying their cognitive knowledge to be able to transfer the suppressed emotions into the process of creating the art. Aceh received the worst impact of Tsunami 2004 compare to other places. Its education is destroyed not only its infrastructure but also its process. Young children is the most fragile victim who needs special treatment during the recovery process. All children experience trauma during their life, not only tsunami victim, although the traumatic level might differs from one to another. The use of art therapy is very helpful in the learning process. The use of art therapy will release "the impediment" within the child to be able to better function in the society. The inclusion of art therapy within curriculum will ensure the usage.

**Key Words:** Art Therapy, Traumatized Children, Developmental Stages, Curriculum

## ABSTRAK

Terapi seni merupakan sebuah proses terapi yang menggunakan seni sebagai instrument pemulihan. Dalam terapi seni tidak difokuskan pada produk akhir tetapi pada proses terapeutiknya. Terapi seni ini berhubungan langsung dengan aspek perkembangan yang dilalui oleh setiap anak. Pada aspek perkembangan fisik, anak menggunakan anatomi tubuhnya untuk mengekspresikan perasaan/emosi atau kemarahan mereka terhadap lingkungannya. Pada saat proses tersebut berlangsung, anak menggunakan pengetahuan mereka agar mampu mentransfer emosi yang tertekan ke dalam sebuah proses penciptaan sebuah seni. Aceh merupakan daerah terparah yang mengalami kerusakan pada saat tsunami 2004 melanda. Pendidikan di Aceh mengalami banyak kerusakan baik kerusakan infrastruktur ataupun proses pembelajarannya. Anak usia dini merupakan korban paling rapuh yang perlu penanganan khusus dalam proses pemulihan. Semua anak pernah mengalami trauma, hanya jenis dan level trauma saja yang berbeda. Hal ini tidak hanya berlaku bagi anak-anak korban tsunami saja tetapi juga bagi anak-anak "normal" lainnya. Penggunaan terapi seni akan

sangat bermanfaat dalam proses pembelajaran anak usia dini. Proses ini akan melepaskan “penghalang” yang ada dalam diri si anak sehingga ia dapat berfungsi dengan lebih baik. Memasukkan terapi seni dalam penyusunan kurikulum akan memastikan digunakannya terapi seni ke dalam proses pembelajaran.

**Kata Kunci:** *Terapi Seni, Anak yang mengalami trauma, Tahap perkembangan, Kurikulum*

## Introduction

After tsunami 2004, Aceh has become the center study for many types of science. This happens because Aceh received many attentions and innovations in solving problems for recovery and development process. Many programs for the educational projects involved art and varieties of playful activities since Aceh status was considered emergency and many children had traumatic experiences due to tsunami and therapy was urgently needed.

### A. Understanding Art Therapy

Universal Declaration of Human Rights in article 25 (2) stated that "Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection"<sup>1</sup>. In addition to it, within article 27 (1), United Nations also declared that "Everyone has the right to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits"<sup>2</sup>. According to Dean, the term of "art" has been considered difficult to define. There has been too much focus on the adjective form of the "art" rather than the noun form. Some art historians concurs that "art" is an ambiguous term with multi various and inconsistent meaning. In his essay, he stated that "art" as a special category of things and practices composed of subcategories defined variously by medium, function, geographic provenance, value, and so on is not recognized worldwide<sup>3</sup>.

The term art therapy has been widely used within wide practice of education, rehabilitation and psychotherapy lately. There is no certain professions are being claimed as the only art therapist. According to Ulman, the term of art therapist is being referred to certain professionals and volunteer workers, even though no similar educational preparation, no set of qualifications, nor even any voluntary association binds these people together. The only thing in common is probably the materials of the visual arts which are used in an attempt to assist the

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<sup>1</sup> United Nation, (1999, April), *Convention on the right of the child*, Bhutan.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Dean, C. (2006, Summer), The Trouble with (the term) *Art*. *Art Journal*, 65(2), 24-32. Retrieved July 19, 2007. From Academic Search Premier database.

integration or reintegration of personality. In art therapy, some emphasis is given on art and on some therapy, or in other words, therapy itself is not enough or art has no meaning without the creative process of understanding it<sup>4</sup>.

Barber says, "Art therapy is not about a beautiful end product but about the process and experience of creation. Spontaneous art of different kinds can be used as tools to uncover the expressiveness of subconscious mind, and can bring problems closer to the surface"<sup>5</sup>. Rubin expressed her understanding toward art therapy as the process of understanding and helping a person through art, and that it encompasses a wide variety of dimensions<sup>6</sup>. These include the integrative aspects of the creative process itself, as well as the use of art as a tool in the service of discharge, uncovering, defense and communication. It is difficult to characterize the process, even with one human being or in one setting, as being any one thing is always different, as art is serving many different possible functions. The important thing to know is what is occurring when art product is created, and to have some sense of its meaning and function for the creator at the moment.

Furthermore, Kramer stated her opinion about art therapy as a means of widening the range of human experiences by creating equivalents for such experiences. It is an area wherein experiences can be chosen, varied, repeated at will. In the creative art, conflict is re-experienced, resolved and integrated<sup>7</sup>. For centuries, art had helped human to reconcile internal and everlasting conflict between society's demands with individual's natural urge. Every works of art contains a core of conflicting drives which give it life and determine form and content to a large degree. Works of art resemble dream, fantasy, and feelings of the creator as a communication tool for the unexpressed emotions. The feeling of burden, repressions and denials is being easier to be deescalated by such artistic experiences. Kramer did not set a clear proportional line between art and therapy

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<sup>4</sup> Ulman, E. (1975), Art therapy: problems of Definition. In Ulman, E, &Dachinger, P (Eds), *Art therapy: n theory and practice* (pp. 3 - 13), New York: Schocken Books.

<sup>5</sup> Barber, V, (2006, September), Art therapy and the child.*Therapy Today*, 17(7), 38-40. Retrieved June 20, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.

<sup>6</sup> Rubin, J.A. (1978), *Child art therapy*. New York, NY: Litton Educational Publishing, Inc.

<sup>7</sup> Kramer, E. (1973). *Art therapy in a children's community* (2nd ed.). Illinois: Charles C Thomas.

in art therapy, since they may vary within a wide range. However anything that is to be called art therapy must genuinely take of both art and therapy<sup>8</sup>.

Briefly, Proulx described the importance of having art therapy with a child. She said that art therapy provided a “container” where a child could interact safely and pleasurably. And by providing age-appropriate art-materials, a child will be able to lead his/her own imagination<sup>9</sup>. The experiences express the communicating, relating and observing process in the art making which will show the emotional and development level of the child. The appropriate activities will surely facilitate the growth of emotional and developmental level of the child.

## **B. Recognizing Young Children with Traumatic Events**

According to United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child in Bhutan, a child is legally defined as a person who has not reach the age of 16 for girls and anyone who has not attained the age of 18 for boys<sup>10</sup>. From this definition we still can track down the child definition into infancy, early childhood, preschool age, and early school age based on the developmental theory as stated by Kravtsova<sup>11</sup>.

At the age of early preschool, children have a sense that they and others have mental states such as thoughts, desires, feelings and plans. At this stage, children have started early social relationships with others. According to Eriksson’s psychosocial stages of development as cited in Broderick and Blewitt, approximately from the age of three to five or six years old, a child tries to behave in ways that involve more “grown up” responsibility and experiments with grown up roles. It is said that on these stages, a child is on the process of finding the right balance between positive and negative feelings, with the positive outweighing the negative. The successful resolution of crisis at this stage will help

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Proulx, L. (2002, May), Strengthening ties, parent-child-dyad: Groupart therapy with toddlers and their parents, *American Journal of Art Therapy*, 40(4), 238. Retrieved August 9, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.

<sup>10</sup> United Nation.(1999, April), *Convention on the right of the child*, Bhutan

<sup>11</sup> Kravtsova, E. (2006, November), The Concept of Age-Specific New Physchological Formations in Contemporary Developmental Psychology. *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology*, 44(6), 6-8. Retrieved July 19, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.

smooth the way to a successful resolution for future crises. On the contrary, unsuccessful resolution at this stage might hinder the progress and make maladaptive behavior more likely<sup>12</sup>.

With a pretty young age, children are more open to many experiences. They are not only cheerful and delightful; many unpleasant experiences also will likely take part at these stages. Children will have to pass these stages just like any other adult before they become grown up – anyone encounters an array of human problems. Despite the feature differences, all relate – a couple’s arguing about their mortgage, a teenager uncertainty about the future, a widower difficulty leaving alone, a young child difficulty adjusting to school - to the same aspects: they all, to a greater or lesser degree, involve in human emotion. Broderick and Blewitt stated that emotions exist to serve many purposes for human beings<sup>13</sup>. Emotions provide human a trusty arsenal for survival skills and also as a major means of communication. Emotions also play a role in mental health and wellness. It is believed that human across countries are sharing basic emotions such as fear, sadness, happiness, anger and surprise. The form of these basic emotions may vary for certain aspects such as the emotions of contempt and disgust when it is viewed from the cross cultural perspectives.

During their growth, children will use these emotions to express their feelings either in fortunate events or traumatic events. Children will be likely to release their positive emotions or negative emotions through their faces, behavior, and attitude and also through their artwork. It is a lot easier to explain the circumstances of children experiencing events which stimulate positive emotions. However, talking about children releasing their negative emotions, what are the circumstances that can be used to describe the traumatic events experienced by children?

Traumatic events for children can vary within different types. There is no doubt that children experiencing natural or human made disaster are having shocking experiences that will leave them scarred for the rest of their life. There is

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<sup>12</sup> Broderick, P.C., &Blewitt, P. (2006), *The Life Span: Human Developent for Helping Professionals (2nd Edition)*, Ohio: Pearson Inc.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

also a potent possibility that children experiencing child abuse, being neglected and being a victim of accidents also considered as experiencing a traumatic event. Moreover, experiencing pressures in daily life from being scolded by parents, first day to school or being surprised by a dog can also be categorized as traumatic events. Taylor describes that children are facing a lot of pressures within everyday life. She figures some examples:

“John was aggressive one day because he had experienced a number of distressing incidents. He got a stick horse and galloped around and around the play yard. When he returned, he said, “I feel better now. Let’s go read a story.” Russ had been frightened by a dog on his way to school. At the finger painting table, he made a resemblance of the dog and then quickly rubbed it out with a remark, “he can’t bark at me now.” Susan picked up a doll and rocked it, saying, “You’ll feel better if I sing to you and hold you close (p.33).<sup>14</sup>”

From these examples the writer assumes that children are very prone to every experience or incidents happens to them or surrounds them. And we can use the creativity within the children to release their pressuring experiences so that they can feel better, and art therapy is one of the options.

### **C. Relationship between Art Therapy and Traumatized Young Children**

There has been a lot of research done to show that art plays a significant part in children’s lives of all ages. Art assists children to show their unexpressed emotions, which is especially essential for young children who are just learning to use language to communicate. Art helps children explore some of the complexities of the real world in small manageable pieces. Art and children is a natural bond. Through art, children absorb opportunity to tell about their evolving concepts, their constructed understanding and their experiences to the world. Children use art as one of their communications tool when they draw, paint or create a clay shape.

Kramer categorizes five basic ways in which art materials can be used as therapy:

1. Precursory activities: scribbling, smearing, exploring physical properties of the material in ways that do not lead to the creation of symbolic configuration but

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<sup>14</sup>Taylor, B. J. (1975). *A child goes forth* (Enlarged Ed.). Utah: Brigham Young University Press.

are experienced as positive and egosyntonic (*Egosyntonic is a medical term referring to behaviors, values, feelings, which are in harmony with or acceptable to the needs and goals of the ego, or consistent with one's ideal self-image. It is studied in detail in abnormal psychology*)

2. Chaotic discharge: spilling, splashing, pounding and other destructive behaviors leading to loss control
3. Art in the service of defense: copying, tracing, banal conventional production, and stereotyped repetition
4. Pictographs: pictorial communication that replace or supplement words (such communication occur as the therapeutic relationship grows)
5. Formed expression: art in the full sense of the word – the production of symbolic configurations that successfully serve both self-expression and communication.<sup>15</sup>

These basic techniques are used in accordance to what children need. In art therapy, children can directly manipulate materials and the environment, symbolically exploring, organizing and assimilating meaning from a complex word of ideas and experiences. This may facilitate order, reduce confusion and uncertainty and promote the integration of experiences. Shostak confirmed the integrative process is significant for children since they will experience, communicate and negotiate through developmental levels<sup>16</sup>. The person in charge who handles these traumatized young children also need to know the characteristics of a child before he or she applies one of these five ways toward the children. Moreover, this person needs to keep in mind that art therapy is more focused toward the therapeutic process rather than the artistic product from the child. Barber said that art activities within nurseries and school are frequently applied without a true understanding of the process children are going through. Children are too often being stopped in mid-stream when doing a painting because the carers think it is a “nice” picture and if the child does not stop to paint, the paint will stop to be a “nice” picture afterall. This meets the need of the carers rather than the child<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Johnson, K. (1989), *Trauma in the Lives of Children*, Claremont, CA: Hunter House, Inc.

<sup>16</sup> Shostak, B., DiMaria, A., & Schoebel, N. (1985). Art therapy in the schools: A position paper of the American Art Therapy Association. *Art therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 2(1), 19 – 22.

<sup>17</sup> Barber, Loc. Cit

Shostak, DiMaria&Schoebel narrated that art therapy in a school setting can offer opportunities to work through impediments that hold back educational success<sup>18</sup>. Art therapy can smooth the progress of appropriate social behavior and support healthy affective development so that children can become more receptive to learning, realizing their social and academic potential. At the early school age, children face a lot of depression because of their transition time from home environment to school environment. Moving from home to school is experienced by children approximately by the age of three. This time of transition evokes a wide variety of emotions, behaviors, and concerns for both young children and their parents. For many children it is considered a major stepping-stone on the road to becoming more independent. Transition literature as well as transitions studies over the past decade call for a more comprehensive approach to this time of change. The more comprehensive approach is built upon a commitment to teamwork and collaboration where educators and parents work together in designing and implementing transition programs. The national Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) stated that early learning standards can be a valuable part of a comprehensive, high-quality system of services for young children, contributing to young children's education<sup>19</sup>. It is suggested to reduce the level of children anxiety at the transition period and also by recognizing that children's becoming comfortable in a new school setting is an ongoing process, not a single event.

It is believed that art therapy in a public or a private school is relevant to empower children's maturation in education and social emotion. The use of art as a therapy in a school setting will help the children to decrease their anxiety level. In art therapy, the interaction session with the children may be chaotic or less. There is a time when a child want to release his/her anger or pressure by batting or bashing towards his/her peers of the carers.Barber<sup>20</sup> also shared her experiences working with a group of girls, who for various personal reasons are

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<sup>18</sup> Shostak, B., DiMaria, A., & Schoebel, Loc. Cit

<sup>19</sup> National Association for the education of Young Children (2002), Early Learning standard: Creating the conditions for success. *Joint position statement on early childhood*, Washington, DC: Author.

<sup>20</sup> Barber, Loc. Cit

failing within the school system. She discovered that these girls have experienced psychological burden due to abuse and also family breakdown. The dialogue less happens between Barber and the girls; however, their art making unfold the story. They spoke with the unspoken language. The art therapy does not demand children to talk; engaging in the process is the crucial point. Another example was given with a girl who just lost her mother. She used the art therapy process to work through her grief. In her graffiti image, she draws a homage to all people who had died, not only her own and extended family, but also her friend's losses too. She did not say much but her image did.

The grief process is probably the least talked about. It is painful and critical, time of rebuilding and reordering one's world. It takes a long time to reach a state of emotional balance especially for young children. Each person experiences differently, but it always a time of powerful and often overwhelming emotion. Sadly enough, there is no time frame set for healing to take place. Some might recover in a little over a year; others might take more than three years or might even face it during their life time. When a child is experiencing these sorts of losses, it is important that the child has a loved one to comfort him/her at these moments, as well as having the necessary art tools to work through the feelings. Raymer & McIntyre said:

Art is a balance for feelings, thoughts and experiences. Art work made spontaneously, can communicate feelings, experiences, fantasies and behavior and coping patterns through medium viewed as safer than verbal communication. ...it quickly apparent that, through art, children responded especially well. It appeared as if they responded much more quickly than through traditional verbal therapy. Art provided a tool which improved self-esteem, was non-threatening and could be used by the child as a healthy release (p.29)<sup>21</sup>.

Raymer& McIntyre also added the goals of using art therapy for the bereaved children<sup>22</sup>. The first is encouraging self-expression in art process and product with self and group reflection. This goal is achieved through short

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<sup>21</sup> Raymer, M., & McIntyre, B. (1987), An art support group for bereaved children and adolescents. *Art therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 4(1), 27-35.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

discussions about art in order to stimulate child's self-expression and increase awareness. The second is catharsis in art process and product; creative and constructive expression of feelings. This goal is achieved by expressing emotions with no theme borders. Children may draw whatever they like to release their suppressed feelings. The sadness, pain, helplessness, rage, guilt, anger and preoccupation may be expressed freely in the protective environment utilizing art. The development of flexible but firm inner control and group cohesiveness are the third and the fourth goal. And the last goal is the individual growth and increased self-esteem in art process and product.

It is evident that art therapy fosters and facilitates cognitive and emotional development by providing experiences conducive to psycho-educational growth. This art therapy will not only play a pivotal role for children with special needs but also children who may experience difficulty in their social life. Arnheim said (as cited in Raymer & McIntyre) that art is "...an indispensable tool in dealing with the tasks of life"<sup>23</sup>.

#### **D. Art Therapy, Child Development and Early Childhood Curriculum**

If we want to include art therapy within early childhood curriculum, there should be a rationale for it. We need to create a reason why we think the art therapy is significant to take part in the curriculum. Beforehand, we need to understand the young child's developmental stage related to the use of art to be included in the early childhood curriculum. According to National Association for the Education of Young Children, early childhood is defined as the period from birth to age eight<sup>24</sup>. However, the development rate is different each child; some may perform earlier or later to compare it to other children. Below is the general overview of a child's developmental stage in terms of physical development, social development, emotional development and cognitive development as described by Brewer<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> National Association for the Education of Young Children, Loc Cit

<sup>25</sup> Brewer, J. A. (1995), *Introduction to Early Childhood Education: Preschool through Primary grades* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed), Boston: Simon & Schuster Company.

Figure 1. Physical Development

	Birth to three years old	Three to four years old	Five to six years old	Seven to eight years old
Physical Development	<p>Physical skills develop rapidly</p> <p>Sits and crawls</p> <p>Walks and begins to run</p> <p>Fine motor skills develop; can stack and pick up small objects</p> <p>Manages spoon or fork for feeding</p> <p>Grasps and releases objects</p>	<p>Physical skills increase</p> <p>Rides a tricycle</p> <p>Walks up and down stairs, alternating feet</p> <p>Runs</p> <p>Jumps with both feet</p> <p>Walks balance beam</p> <p>Catches ball with arms extended</p> <p>Walks backward and on tiptoe</p> <p>Holds crayon with fingers</p>	<p>Skips on alternate feet</p> <p>Rides two-wheel bike</p> <p>Skates</p> <p>Throws fairly accurate</p> <p>Catches ball with hands</p> <p>Turn somersaults</p> <p>Participating in games requiring physical skills</p> <p>Small muscle development increases; eye-hand coordination develops</p> <p>Fine muscle control increases; can use hammer, pencil, scissors, etc.</p>	<p>Physical skills become important in self-concept</p> <p>Energy levels are high</p> <p>Rate of growth slows</p> <p>Fine muscles control is good; can form letters well</p> <p>Permanent teeth appear</p> <p>Body proportions; facial structure change</p>

Figure 2. Social development

	Birth to three years old	Three to four years old	Five to six years old	Seven to eight years old
Social Development	<p>Responds to others</p> <p>Enjoys company of other children</p> <p>Can maintain involvement with another for a very short period</p> <p>Is unable to share without coaxing</p> <p>Shows very little</p>	<p>Becomes more self aware</p> <p>Develops more altruistic feelings</p> <p>Becomes aware of racial/ethnic and sexual differences</p> <p>Is able to take direction, follow some rules</p> <p>Has strong</p>	<p>Expresses rigid ideas about sex roles</p> <p>Has best friends but for short period of time</p> <p>Quarrel often but anger is short lived</p> <p>Is able to share and take turns</p>	<p>Is more competitive with peers</p> <p>Depends on parents for expansion of interests, and activities</p> <p>Is influenced by peer opinions</p> <p>Plays with opposite sex</p>

	<p>ability to postpone gratification</p> <p>Imitates actions of others</p> <p>Begins to engage in parallel play</p>	<p>feelings toward home and family</p> <p>Shows a growing sense of self-reliance</p> <p>Parallel play is common; cooperative play begins</p> <p>Imaginary playmates are fairly common</p>	<p>Is eager to participate in school experiences</p> <p>Considers teacher very important</p> <p>Wants to be the first</p> <p>Become possessive</p>	<p>less often</p> <p>Needs teacher approval</p> <p>Is able to share</p> <p>Wants to please</p> <p>Is more dependent at work and play</p> <p>Forms more enduring friendships</p> <p>Peer groups begin to form</p>
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Figure 3. Emotional Development

	Birth to three years old	Three to four years old	Five to six years old	Seven to eight years old
Emotional Development	<p>Cannot tolerate frustration</p> <p>Cries easily</p> <p>Is often unable to control impulses</p> <p>Begins to express affections</p> <p>Needs routine and security</p> <p>Begin to perceive emotions of others</p> <p>Expresses self, sometimes emphatically</p>	<p>Can tolerate some frustration</p> <p>Develops some self-control</p> <p>Appreciates surprises and novel events</p> <p>Begins to show sense of humor</p> <p>Needs overt expressions of affection</p> <p>Fears the dark, being abandoned, strange situations</p>	<p>Expresses and labels feelings</p> <p>Control aggressions better</p> <p>Expresses less concern when separated from parents</p> <p>Expresses sense of humor in jokes, nonsense words</p> <p>Learns right from wrong</p> <p>Develop a conscience</p>	<p>Expresses reactions to others</p> <p>Is sensitive to ridicule and criticism</p> <p>Expresses more worries; war, loss of parents</p> <p>Shows more persistence</p> <p>Expresses more empathy; is able to see others' viewpoints</p>

Figure 4. Cognitive Development

	Birth to three years old	Three to four years old	Five to six years old	Seven to eight years old
Three to four years old	Sensorimotor investigations of environment is	Follow instruction of two commands	Shows a growing attention span	Differences in reading and language

	<p>predominate</p> <p>Development of concepts is rapid</p> <p>Develops a sense of object permanence</p> <p>Develops language</p> <p>May use some number and color words but may not understand them</p>	<p>Makes impulsive judgements</p> <p>And frequent mistakes</p> <p>Develops vocabulary rapidly</p> <p>Uses number without understanding</p> <p>Has difficulty differentiating fantasy and reality</p> <p>Begins to classify, especially by function</p> <p>Begin to use some functional abstract words</p> <p>“why” questions are constant</p> <p>Thinking is very egocentric</p>	<p>Is able to seriate objects</p> <p>Is able to group objects</p> <p>Is more deliberate, less impulsive in judgements</p> <p>Differentiates between fantasy and reality</p> <p>Uses language aggressively, in categorization</p> <p>Is aware that words and pictures represent real object</p> <p>Becomes interested in numbers and letters</p> <p>Knows names of colors</p> <p>Does not spontaneously use rehearsal in memory tasks</p> <p>Follows three unrelated commands</p> <p>Some children begin to conserve number. length</p>	<p>abilities widen</p> <p>Transition to concrete operational thinking begins</p> <p>Talking and discussions are important</p> <p>Is able to plan</p> <p>Can sustain interest over long periods of time</p> <p>Begins to understand cause and effects</p> <p>Develop a growing understanding of time and money</p> <p>Uses slang and profanity</p> <p>Understands and uses more abstract terms</p> <p>Expresses more awareness of community, world</p>
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Developing early childhood curriculum is guided by what we know about how children grow and learn. This includes knowing how children develop physically, how the social environment affects them, their emotional changes and their absorbance of the knowledge provided to them. This overview plays a pivotal role in creating early childhood curriculum and integrating art therapy within it. All of these four areas are related one to another and supporting children in their educational process. While creating art or expressing their

thoughts into art pieces, children are applying all these four components. They are using their physic to express their affection/empathy or anger toward their surroundings. In the process, they are applying their cognitive knowledge to be able to transfer the suppressed emotions into the process of creating the art. Knowing children's developmental stages, teachers, administrators other professionals will be able to create the curriculum based on appropriate level. These stages will not only help in creating a flexible program for the children but also will help the involved persons to observe the children carefully. Each child is different, even though the age is the same; however, there are always differences within them. These stages will also be of assistance in designing the program that will meet individual and also group needs.

These stages also assist the implementation of art therapy within the curriculum. Since teacher, administrators, or other related professionals understand these developments, they will be able to insert the art therapy process at the necessary level for the child who might need it. There will be people who will define art therapy to be the same as art in education; however, once again art therapy is different. Art therapy will help these young children to express their emotions, because it is the process being counted. The carers should not set up certain standard or critique the children's pieces of work because art therapy is not producing certain products with certain standard to follow which may even cause another stress for children as they have to fulfill the need of the standard not their own desire. The art which is supposed to be the learning experience will automatically become a boring experience. Kubie and Kaelin said through art, a youngster may experience not only the momentary release of tension through a discharge of surplus energy, the release of un-conflicted energy, newly available for constructive use, through the sublimation and resolution of conflicts once draining his resources<sup>26</sup>. Through art, a process in which one is in touch with all level of consciousness, and with extra stimuli, one's level of awareness may be enlarged, expanded, deepened, and sharpened. This openness to experience may

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<sup>26</sup> Rubin, Loc. Cit

itself be experienced; first, as a mood; secondly, as an understanding; and thirdly, as expression.

Through art, a child has the opportunity to remove something abstract from his/her mind or understanding and place it within a concrete, translating mind into matter. By helping children to discover what underlying thoughts and feelings they put in their artwork, it will help children to develop a better understanding of themselves and how they relate to others surround them. Annette marieVaccaro, an art therapist from Livingston, said “We don’t try to tell their story. We try to help them tell their story”<sup>27</sup>. Thus, it is hoped that through the inclusion of art therapy and deeper understanding of its application at school, the use of art as a therapy will improve children’s development in expressing and releasing themselves from pressures which will likely impede their learning process to be a better person with better mental health, to becomee a better member within society. The report from Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR, 2003) mentioned:

“The role that the arts can pay in improving mental health outcomes is twofold. In conjunction with art therapist, they can be used as a therapeutic care strategy. Secondly, they can play a key role in breaking down mental health problems and can help reintegration into the wider community. There is a range of ways that art can make a contribution to promoting positive mental health. It can be a self-initiated activity providing a form of self-expression; it can be used to improve care environments; it can change the way society views mental illness; and can also provide service users with a voice (p. 5)”<sup>28</sup>

In her article, Heenan reveals the positive outcomes contributed by art therapy for the mental health of her beneficiaries<sup>29</sup>. The art classes led to improved self-esteem, which in turn enabled participants to engage in more positive social behavior. Therefore, the inclusion of art therapy within school curriculum or other programs intended to improve the well-being of human is necessary. Even though

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<sup>27</sup> Beeson, Ed. (2006), “Picture of Hope”, *Herald News*. December 5, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Heenan, D. (2006, March). Art as therapy: An effective way of promoting positive mental health?, *Disability and Society*, 21(2), 179-191.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

the research about art therapy has been done for more than 20 years, further researches still needed to undertake to provide more scientific based evidence of the beneficial use of art therapy in individual's lives especially children.

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