

An Overview of Arts Education and Reflections on Special Education

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ABSTRACT Importance and necessity of arts education is commonly emphasized and its positive outcomes on students are revealed. Teachers are expected to have necessary knowledge and skills in planning and implementing art activities effectively. In addition to the crucial role of arts education in general education settings, it has various implications and benefits in special education as well. It is commonly believed that arts education improves many skills of individuals with special needs and it has both complementary and therapeutic roles in special education settings. The present study aims to provide a comprehensive overview on arts education and its reflections in special education. In order to achieve this aim, document analysis was used in the study. Findings are discussed with relevant literature and recommendations for further research and practices are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the basic necessities and fundamental dynamics for the development of societies in terms of social and economic aspects. Accordingly, education system is entirely based on student, teacher and curriculum and there is continuous interaction between them (Kan 2015) and the system affects the content and quality of education as well. Aim of education is to raise individuals who are creative and self-confident and to help individuals to adjust to the society in a healthy and effective way. In addition, exploring the talents of individuals and integrating them into society through teaching is another aim of education (Sadik 2002).

Art is an important phenomenon of the social and cultural environment and it is perceived as an important tool for the socialization of the individual. Middleton (2016) indicated that art generates social ties in the society and it promotes union and solidarity directly or indirectly, increase awareness on social issues and result in social changes. In general terms, art is an activity arising from the efforts for explaining emotions and thoughts of individuals about nature through tools such as line, color, shape, voice,

word and rhythm in an effective way (Dixon and Chalmers 1990; Artut 2002).

Although whether art can be defined still remains as a matter of controversy, it has been defined by many disciplines in different ways including philosophy, education and science. In line with this; concept, definition and content of art and applications of art have changed dramatically (Gonen et al. 2016). In addition to the complexity of the art as a concept, defining arts education is also difficult. As mentioned before, education is one of the most important tools for individuals to adapt to innovations, changes and contemporary civilization. It is a certain fact that the role of education in discovering and developing individuals' creativity and talents is really crucial. Based on this perspective, it can be inferred that art can be developed through education and it can be more prevalent in this way. Arts education is regarded as one of the main components of education. According to Savoie (2017), arts education promotes both individual and society in terms of raising creative individuals and creative citizens for the society. Today, the need for arts education increases day by day in line with the rapidly changing world (Anderson 2003). Accordingly,

Greene et al. (2014) emphasized that art experiences improve students' critical thinking, help them to use time effectively and observe their environment in a more conscious way. Hursen and Islek (2017) also indicated that arts education increases motivation of students.

For students who receive arts education, the links between artistic and cognitive development must be robust. In this way, educational objectives can be achieved. When recent developments are considered, multi-disciplinary perspective on arts education is really crucial. It is suggested that arts education is a multi-disciplinary field and it can be integrated into pre-school education, mathematics and science education, language education and special education (Penketh 2016). Regardless of obstacles and financial, physical or environmental difficulties, every student requires the opportunity to learn in and through the arts (Malley and Silverstein 2014; Uzunboyulu et al. 2017) and it is also known that art activities contribute to individuals with special needs in terms of both socialization and academic development.

According to Ataman (2003), special education aims to gain skills to children with special needs to be independent and productive individuals. Nevertheless, main aim of special education is to increase the quality of life of individuals with special needs and to be self-sufficient individuals through appropriate education programs prepared based on their performance level, needs, talents and interests beginning from early childhood (Baglama and Demirok 2016; Genc and Ozcan 2017).

Aim of the Study

Today, the idea of arts education for all students is supported by teachers and it is indicated that considerable progress is needed for integrating arts education into special education classrooms (Almqvist and Christophersen 2017). Furthermore, Hourigan (2014) stated that arts education organizations and special education institutions need to work together and arts teachers or professionals and special education teachers should focus on how to reach students with special needs and integrate arts into special education. Therefore, it can be inferred that arts education and art activities must be integrated into special education in order to gain social and academic skills to individuals with special needs. Based on the literature mentioned above,

the present study aims to provide an overview of basic arts education and reflections of special education in arts education based on a comprehensive and relevant literature.

METHODOLOGY

Research model, data collection and data analysis of the study are provided in this section.

Research Model

This study is based on a literature review which aims to provide an overview on arts education and reflections of special education in arts education. In order to achieve the aim of the present study, document analysis was used. Document analysis is a qualitative research method and it contains a detailed examination of written materials which includes information about a specific topic or topics and determination of certain categories and themes (Yildirim and Simsek 2008).

Documents are important resources in qualitative studies. Bowen (2009) stated that document analysis method is the analysis of published, written materials about a phenomenon which is targeted to be examined. Accordingly, a comprehensive analysis of information in published documents is considered for a systematic examination and review.

Data Collection and Analysis of the Data

For data analysis, relevant documents were determined and obtained from different sources including especially books and academic journals. Then, theoretical inferences were made from texts from the documents in line with the aim of the present study. Lastly, documents were brought together in order to constitute a meaningful whole and results of the study were obtained in this way.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results of the comprehensive literature review on arts, arts education and their reflections and implications in special education are provided in detail.

Definition of Arts and Arts Education

Arts is a universal language. Arts aims to scrutinize, perceive, feel and question the aes-

thetic part of human and it is an effort to reach the beauty between human and object (Adams et al. 2017). According to the classical definition of arts, it is categorized as music, literature, theatre, dance, painting, sculpture, architecture and cinema (Tokdemir 2002). Arts facilitates social changes and adaptations; keep understanding, thinking and perceiving abilities of human and arouse emotional parts. From past to present, arts has become an important communication tool between individuals (Yuzbasiyev 2010).

In basic arts education, students' creativity, their skills on observing and expressing their emotions through arts are supported. It is widely known that arts education boosts and strengthens creativity in individuals (Hui et al. 2015; Winner et al. 2014). Buyurgan and Buyurgan (2007) indicated that basic arts education includes line, form, place, three-dimensional structure, visual perception and examination. Lectures of basic arts education are based on principles of visual design. Basic arts lectures aim to train students based on the principles of visual design and it is the beginning of the education process to promote visual, emotional and social development of the student. Individual learns the difference between seeing and looking through hand, eye and brain coordination through arts education, inclines to self-realize and gains tolerance.

Arts education begins from pre-school years and lasts for lifelong (Gumgum 2016). Arts education is important for all individuals to facilitate their visual perception. It makes them to be responsible, active and productive individuals. Importance of arts education is accepted throughout the world and it aims to reveal the creative side of the individual through improving aesthetical sensitivity (Bradshaw 2017). When the countless advantages of arts education are considered, the importance of arts can be clearly seen. More importantly, arts education liberates modern human who exposes to intense stimulus. Mercin and Alakus (2007) mentioned about the justifications for why arts education is important and stated that individual, economic, psychological, sociological and political factors need to be considered. In addition, arts education leads individuals to refuse behaviors which prevent their thoughts and ideas. Hetland (2013) stated that arts education improves learning of students in other academic areas as well.

An effective art activity depends on the essential knowledge, skills and competency of arts teachers and adequate programs. Robust knowledge on arts philosophy is required for developing an effective arts education program. In addition to being competent, teachers primarily need to believe in the benefits of arts activities for students and develop such a perspective (San 1977). In addition, Ulutas and Ersoy (2004) proposed that a qualified and competent arts educator needs to trigger students' self-development based on their personalities. Teachers who discourage and criticize their students negatively affect students' artistic development. Teachers who are creative, productive and empathetic are positive role models for their students.

Five Stages of Development in Children's Art

Change in children's art activities follows a path in parallel with their mental and physical developments. Yavuzer (2012) categorized the development stages of children's arts in five stages: These five stages include:

1. Scribbling Stage (2-4 years)
2. Pre-schematic Stage (4-7 years)
3. Schematic Stage (7-9 years)
4. Realism (Grouping) Stage (9-12 years)
5. Apparent Naturalism Stage (12-14 years)

In pre-school years, drawing is a favorite activity for children (Papandreou 2014; Uzunboylu and Evram 2017) and all children begin with scribbling when they draw between the ages of 2 and 4. In the first years, children draw randomly and then they enter into a stage in which there is a control between intelligence and hand. Children begin to make sense of their first scribbling works. Although these scribbling works are similar, children try to express different things. In pre-schematic stage, children try to enrich their relation between the external worlds. When children's learning improves, their drawings transform into advanced schemes. Straight lines are arms and legs; and round lines are head of the human body. The child consciously draws the shape and continuously changes it. They begin to show unseen parts of things and this is called transparency. For instance, the child draws a house and show mother, father and other things in the house. The child is not aware about composition and he/she uses colors enthusiastically independent from reality. Yavuzer (2012) indicated that teachers need to pro-

vide an education which tries to improve children's imagination.

In schematic stage, a human scheme is formed in children's mind after many trials and they established a link between their own body and mental structure. For this reason, teacher discovers many different human picture in class. Main and important parts of the body are exaggerated in the drawings of children. In contrast with this, they ignore the parts which they perceive as unimportant. Furthermore, they begin to draw geometrical shapes as well and their interest in technology and analysis is increased. Kirisoglu (1991) described that children's space concept and perception is developed and figures are identified with the designed spaces or places.

The ages between 9 and 12 are a critical period in which physical and psychological developments and changes are critical and individuals are at realism stage of drawing at these ages. Individuals develop a realistic perspective since they begin to deal with reality. Concepts of planning, perspective, color and proportion become clear. They prefer painting independently as in the early childhood years. Light or shadow is not used but body proportions are included in figures. They might feel shy about not being able to draw the things as the same. Therefore, they become aware of social liberty and groupings begin. All these situations affect children's arts as well. Differences between drawings of girls and boys might be observed. Many research examined gender differences in children in terms of their drawings (Dogru et al. 2006). Accordingly, Cherney et al. (2006) indicated that gender and age significant determinants of children's drawings. Children draw in a more complex and realistic way with age and girls are more aware of both essential and inessential details in their drawings.

Naturalism stage falls between 12 and 14 ages which is regarded as the beginning of adolescence. Individuals are interested in more concrete things and they give importance to perspective in their drawings. In the drawings, kinetic effects, dramatic and emotional scenes are seen (Yavuzer 2012). Aesthetic intuition and knowledge are intensive. Individuals at this stage tend to discrete thinking. There is convenience with the reality in the drawings in terms of topic, color and proportion and they can make drawings from nature (Artut 2004).

Children can reflect their emotions through arts and express their feelings and thoughts about facts and events. Drawings of children are accepted as mirrors of their internal worlds (Ehrlen 2008). Arts, especially drawing, facilitates students' mental health through giving them the opportunity to express themselves. Responsibility and collaboration in individual and group work is triggered with arts activities. Arts education prepares the children to the learning stages through multiple stimulations and leads them to learn through experience. Arts activities discover the connection between child's internal and external world in drawing and painting. Unal (2014) stated that drawings of children provide clues about their internal worlds. In addition, when the goals of arts education are achieved, students experience and learn a variety of things. These learning experiences include experiencing emotional relief and satisfaction, research and exploration, increase in individual expressions, improvement in imagination, acquiring various skills, achievement of eye-hand coordination, using creative materials planning, implementing and finalizing their own work and increase in self-confidence.

Contribution of Arts Education for Individuals with Special Needs

Special education includes individualized education opportunities which are based on developmental characteristics of individuals with special needs and ways for providing more effective and efficient teaching to individuals with special needs are aimed in special education (Parrott et al. 2000). Arts is crucial for the development of all children and it is especially beneficial for individuals with special needs. Both cognitive and motor skills are supported with arts education which generally needs support for the children with special needs (Saldana 2016). It is known that arts education has an important role in the lives of individuals with special needs in terms of developing identity, gaining sense of achievement, increasing confidence and courage, adjusting into social life, developing eye-hand-brain coordination, improving and regulating emotional structure and developing aesthetic inclination and pleasure. Artistic activities for children with special needs can facilitate their learning since these activities are visually supported. On the other hand, children and

young people with disability have limited opportunities of engaging in arts experiences and activities (Penketh 2017). Therefore, it is important to support and increase arts practices for individuals with special needs.

Arts education is an alternative way for understanding individuals with special needs and supporting them to gain necessary skills for living independently. For this reason, arts education for individuals with special needs has gained more importance in recent years (Caglayan 2014). Individuals with special needs can easily express themselves through art activities. Arts education has a positive impact on motor skills, communication skills, concept education and visual perception development of individuals with special needs. Artistic activities help them to develop in many areas. In teaching arts to individuals with special needs, performance of the student is determined in relation to artistic development and education at first and then appropriate method and material are developed. Goals and objectives are targeted and students are expected to develop in these determined skills (Erim and Caferoglu 2012). Furthermore, individuals with special needs might use arts lecture to express their internal worlds. Since different materials and methods are used in art activities, attendance and interest in arts lecture increase. Through these different materials and methods, students can express themselves better since they can make associations between their physical and other characteristics in art activities.

Arts education leads individuals with special needs to improve their creativity; become competent in adaptive skills and behaviors; gain basic work skills and routines; use various materials in appropriate and economic ways; find appropriate solutions for problems they encounter during daily life; try new things; develop their pleasures related with shape, color and work through benefitting from natural beauties of the environment; externalize their thoughts and emotions through arts, shape and model; be productive; live independently in the society and feel themselves as part of the society. Arts education also leads individuals with special needs to form habits as leisure activities. Arts is an important tool for individuals with special needs to communicate and share with each other (Artut 2004). In addition, Salderay (2015) indicated that arts actually contain social integration, love

and hope within itself and these elements help individuals with special needs to cope with difficulties and learn to adapt to their lives in a functional way.

Drawings of children are indicators of physical, mental, psychological, social, linear and creative developments and aspects of their lives. In parallel with physical and cognitive development of children, various developments are observed in artistic activities of children as well. Drawings of individuals with special needs systematically follows a development from simple to complex and this is a natural consequence of linear development of children based on Lowenfeld's view on artistic development in children (Alter-Muri 2002). This linear development is a continuous process following a pattern with transitions in which the transitions are gradual and progressive.

In a drawing of an individual with special needs, lack of planning and vision might be observed. Individuals with special needs usually make scribbles instead of drawing shapes and involving details. For instance, when we tell them to draw a human picture, they draw lines but they ignore details such as eyes, mouth and nose. Nevertheless, children with learning disabilities tend to draw shapes inversely. For instance, they can draw trees inversely. Arts education, especially drawing, is accepted as a primary and beneficial activity for students with special needs in terms of their social and emotional development.

Art workshops including drawing, music, theatre and dance sessions are mandatory in daily education programs for individuals with autism spectrum disorder based on their positive therapeutic impact (Osborne 2003). Arts is crucial for individuals with autism spectrum disorder especially in terms of both verbal and non-verbal communication. Furthermore, arts is also a beneficial component for improving communication in individuals with visual impairment. Dursin and Pamuklu (2015) designed tactile communication tools such as magazines or advertising brochures for individuals with visual impairment and they were asked about their opinions on these tactile communication tools. As a result, individuals with visual impairment reported that they feel happy about these tools since they make it easier to adapt to social life.

Materials and Activities in Arts Education for Individuals with Special Needs

Special education teachers develop individualized education programs for their students with special needs and prepare appropriate learning conditions and environments. They determine which methods and materials to use in arts education. Art activities arise as an expression of the understanding, talent and creation of children and these activities are considered as an indicator of mental development (Spandler et al. 2007). In order to achieve art activities, individuals need to have a certain level of perceptual skills. While individuals with normal development have basic level of these perceptual skills, individuals with special needs might experience difficulties and these difficulties might differ based on the disability group.

Accordingly, Hamarat and Ozdogan (2016) emphasized that objectives, materials and activities need to be prepared based on the characteristics of the disability group. For instance, finding the direction and source of the voice might be an objective for individuals with hearing disability and a voiced clock might be used as a material. Furthermore, improving fine and gross motor skills through various materials or designing a walking box to move in balance are examples for activities for individuals with physical disability. Arts classes need to be simple without distracting components. Since individuals with special needs have short-term attention span, materials with more than one characteristic can disturb them. Three-dimensional design materials such as clay and play-dough are also appropriate to use in arts classes for individuals with special needs. It is known that play-dough improves self-expression skills of children at all ages (Swartz 2005). In order to increase interaction, group studies are important in arts classes for individuals with special needs. One dimensional work including tactile, line, watercolor paint, gouache paint, oil paint, paper folding, paper cutting and gumming are primary activities which can be planned for individuals with special needs. In addition, simple ceramics and three-dimensional raw material painting are other alternatives for arts activities.

For instance, individuals with special needs might not learn colors as concepts spontaneously. At this point, colors are taught with individualized education as concepts with short-term

and long-term objectives. In addition, it is important to ensure consistency among all lessons given to individual with special needs. In other words, when teaching colors, it is important to follow other lessons and therefore individuals with special needs will be able to learn more easily and permanently. For instance, when my home and my family subject are being taught in social studies lecture; students might draw or paint pictures of home furniture in arts lecture. Therefore, learning can be achieved in both academic and social areas in a permanent way. Memory games and tangrams are frequently used materials for gifted individuals (Smutny et al. 2016).

Interaction between arts and special education can be linked to developmental areas of students. These developmental areas include psychomotor, cognitive, language and social development. Large and small muscle developments are involved in psychomotor development. Especially, all activities for small muscle development contribute to hand-eye coordination development. All tearing and sticking activities can be shown as examples for these activities. During watercolor painting, child brushes on the paper and color and therefore hand-eye development is supported.

Furthermore, verbal instructions during arts lessons help to improve receptive language development of students with special needs. For instance, with "paint the door" instruction, student can perceive the concept of "door" and receptive language development is supported. When the child paints the picture with red color, the teacher can ask "tell me with which color are you using to paint" and this supports receptive language development.

Collage which is one of the important arts activities triggers all these mentioned areas and creativity as well. This supports mental development of students with special needs as well. During collage activity, students use scissors and stickers and these activities improves small muscle development to a large extent. More importantly, it is known that children with special needs participate in these activities intentionally and therefore objectives can be achieved in a short time.

When reflections of art lecture for children with special needs to their daily lives are considered, it can be stated that children learn to use materials such as scissors and protect themselves from the dangers of using such materials.

This is related with ensuring security of children with special needs during daily life.

Art Therapy in Special Education

Art therapy is a field in which creative process of producing art is used to develop and improve individuals' mental, physical and emotional existence from all ages. In this regard, art therapy has begun to be used in rehabilitation of psychological disorders beginning from 1960's. Art therapy aims to share an imagination experience with an instructor, externalize it as a visible image and explore it with an instructor. The instructor follows the imagination and creation processes and provides feedback or help the individual. In several definitions, therapeutic value of art process is emphasized and it is stated that gathering and supporting individuals' hand skills, intellectual, imaginary and emotional talents are functions of art therapy. Based on these features, art therapy is regarded as self-discovery, expression and treatment process (Rubin 2016).

Furthermore, Wong (1998) emphasized the expressive and healing features of visual arts and addressed art as a cure for psychological difficulties and an increasing factor for the value of art in the society. In addition to these features of art therapy, it has important implications for education as well (Karkou 1999). It is generally aimed to use and integrate art therapy in educational settings to improve learning. In addition of using an art therapy in general education settings, art therapy is also used in special education based on its therapeutic aspects.

Art therapy in special education is a growing area with the aim of using arts as a therapy to improve learning and gain various skills to individuals with special needs. Martin (2009) indicated individuals with autism spectrum disorder experience lack of imagination and abstract thinking skills and art therapy plays an important role in improving these skills. It is also stated that art therapy is beneficial for individuals with learning disability and developmental delays and it positively affects other treatments including occupational therapy or speech-language therapy (Hackett et al. 2017; Robinson 2015). Individuals learn to express themselves in verbal and non-verbal ways, take responsibility and improve their creativity through art therapy. Therefore, it can be inferred that art therapy

has a crucial role in improving many skills of individuals with special needs and increase their social integration since it facilitates verbal and non-verbal communication.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to provide an overview of arts education and its reflections in special education. Definition of basic arts education, arts and special education and reflections of arts in special education are the main topics discussed in the present study. In conclusion, it is seen that special education, arts education and art therapy are combined and used together in many practices in the related fields. Integrating arts into general and special education settings for facilitating self-expression, providing emotional regulation and improving various skills of students has gained great importance recently. In addition, use of artistic materials and applying art therapy are implications of arts into education settings and it is commonly accepted that arts education is an important element in schools as a complementary, functional and therapeutically component.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the results obtained from the study, recommendations for further research and practices are provided. There should be more courses on teaching arts in teacher education programs in order to train teachers who are competent in integrating implications of arts into educational settings. Educational policies and programs should mostly emphasize arts education. Seminars and in-service trainings on arts education might be organized for both teachers working in general and special education settings. More research with qualitative or experimental research design should be done in order to increase awareness on arts education and provide evidence for the effectiveness of arts education in educational disciplines. Families should participate in arts education implementations and take active roles in the process.

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