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Art as a Space for Development for Mental Health and Hardiness of Students in the Context of War in Ukraine

Sztuka jako przestrzeń rozwoju zdrowia psychicznego i odporności studentów w kontekście wojny w Ukrainie

ABSTRACT: The article deals with the issues of mental health of student youth and the development of the hardiness of students during the war. The purpose of the article is to analyse the possibilities of a positive impact of art on mental health and the development of student hardiness in the context of the war in Ukraine through the implementation of the elective course "Art as a Space for the Development of Mental Health of Student Youth". In the course of our research, we conducted observations and interviews with Ukrainian students of the Faculty of Arts studying in the area of active hostilities. The work provides specific examples of the use of works by representatives of the Ukrainian and European cultural community. A special place is given to the methods of art therapy, the principles and methods of working with young people are revealed.

KEYWORDS: art, course, hardiness development, mental health, student youth.

ABSTRAKT: Artykuł porusza problematykę zdrowia psychicznego młodzieży studenckiej oraz kształtowania odporności studentów w warunkach wojennych. Celem artykułu jest analiza możliwości pozytywnego wpływu

wu sztuki na zdrowie psychiczne oraz rozwój odporności studentów w kontekście wojny w Ukrainie poprzez realizację fakultatywnego kursu „Sztuka jako przestrzeń rozwoju zdrowia psychicznego młodzieży studenckiej”. W ramach badań przeprowadzono obserwacje oraz wywiady ze studentami wydziałów sztuki, którzy kształcą się na terenach objętych działaniami wojennymi. Artykuł podaje przykłady wykorzystania dzieł przedstawicieli ukraińskiej i europejskiej wspólnoty kulturalnej. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono metodom arteterapii, zaprezentowano zasady i metody pracy z młodzieżą.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: sztuka, kurs, rozwój odporności, zdrowie psychiczne, młodzież studencka.

Introduction

The events in Ukraine since the beginning of the military aggression have had a considerable impact on the education system. Ukrainian society is facing questions about educational strategies that would have a positive impact on educating children and young people during war. There are a number of priorities in the Ukrainian education system: preserving the health of students who have to study in stressful situations, avoiding depression to deal with life situations and optimising their strength to work online when they are in the area where hostilities are taking place. We already have examples of scientific publications that address these issues. Thus, scientists, Myroniuk I., Slabkyi H., Shcherbinska O., & Bilak-Lukianchuk V. raise the issue of the mental health of Ukrainians from a medical point of view, and it is impossible to deny that many citizens need professional medical care [Myroniuk et al., 2022, p. 26]. The authors define mental exhaustion is one of the main consequences of the war for Ukrainians that affect their health. The student audience is no exception.

The Impact of War on the Mental Health of Student Youth

For students, studying in a time of war is a test of their hardiness, including their emotional, cognitive and social development. In the course of our study, we conducted observations and interviews with Ukrainian students of the Faculty of Arts of the pedagogical profile studying in the area of active hostilities (Grygoriy Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University). The educational process was carried out mainly online and in a blended learning environment. It turned out that disruption of daily life due to shelling, the sound of alarms, and worries about their loved, lack of electricity and internet had a negative impact 25% of respondents to the desire to drop out of school. 15% did not complete their assignments on time, 40% were forced migrants (both internally in Ukraine and abroad), which was much better for academic work from the security point of view but required adapting to

new circumstances, time zones, different cultures and mentality of the country where students came to live, etc. An interesting fact was that 23% of students who successfully completed the master's course and started working in their speciality (teaching subjects in the educational field of "Art" in Ukrainian schools) expressed a desire to continue their postgraduate studies, choosing for their research topics related to the impact of various types of art on personal development and young teachers had a school classroom where they worked, consisting of students from schools in the combat zone.

Our research has shown that working with students in schools majoring in 014.13 Secondary Education 'Art. Musical Art' and the use of art opportunities during practice to overcome stress had a positive impact on the psychological state of students. We have noted that during various types of internships and while teaching 'Art' lessons, students who could complain about health problems, anxiety, depression, etc. during classroom lessons with teachers, began to complain less about health problems, their mood improved significantly, communication with students based on common interests in contemporary music spread, some students mastered online tools for learning music, music programs, and examples of developing art projects with the help of using online tools appeared, which were oriented not only to work with the student audience, but also demonstrated a desire to involve everyone who is looking for psychological support in creative interaction through the means of various types of art.

Among the methods of organising the educational process in higher education, in particular for the development of mental health and hardiness of the individual, we highlight the possibility of a variable component of educational programmes, in particular, the modelling of integrated thematic modules. Therefore, after conducting theoretical research on the problem, observing students, and in order to preserve the mental health and develop the hardiness of students studying in war conditions, we developed an elective course 'Art as a Space for the Development of Mental Health of Student Youth', which was introduced into the educational practice of the Faculty of Arts of H. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University in the academic year 2024–2025.

The purpose of the article is to analyse the possibilities of a positive impact of art on mental health and the development of student hardiness in the context of the war in Ukraine through the implementation of the elective course 'Art as a Space for the Development of Mental Health of Student Youth'.

The Role of Art in Strengthening Students' Psychological Hardiness

In today's difficult conditions in Ukraine, students often encounter difficulties in their studies and personal relationships, which affects the deterioration of their mental health. Therefore, to level out such negative factors and develop the hardiness of the individual, we believe that the role of art is quite significant. For stabilizing the emotional state and developing the hardiness of the individual, art has long been considered an effective means of influencing a person. In the Concept of the New Ukrainian School [Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine Concept "New Ukrainian School", 2017], the State Standard of the Art Educational Sector [Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. 2020]. On certain issues of state standards for complete general secondary education, we find important guidelines that will provide a scientific and methodological basis for compiling an elective course „Art as a Space for the Mental Health of Student Youth and the Development of Hardiness „, in which a person studying in war conditions will be able to adapt, turn to his inner „I“, and thanks to various types of creative activity, reduce emotional stress, express emotions that cannot be „withstood“ in words, overcome nervous pressure caused by external factors. Engaging in artistic and creative activities can relieve stress, develop hardiness, and adapt to uncertain conditions. The course is designed to be implemented both in person and online and can improve communication, avoid alienation, and develop the hardiness of the student's personality.

Development and Implementation of the Course "Art as a Space for the Development of Mental Health of Student Youth"

We believe that the sole responsibility for the education of the younger generation lies with the music teacher, who, through the means of musical culture, is able to effectively shape the national identity of students, influencing not only the intellectual but also the emotional sphere of the individual [Binytska, Bezemchuk, Nahorny, 2024, p. 64]. Therefore, we have developed an elective course "Art as a Space for Mental Health of Student Youth" for students majoring in 014 Musical Art of the first bachelor's degree in higher education.

Among the guidelines for selecting the topics of classes in the course we have developed, we identify its first module, "Create to Relieve Stress," in

the process of learning about different types of art. This direction is important so that the student can track the level of his artistic interests and preferences before the start of the war and during active hostilities. This stage aims to consider how art can help to manage and express emotions in times of war. To provide students with tools and techniques to use art as a way of self-expression and self-support during the period of study in the territory where active hostilities are taking place, as well as for internally displaced persons. The following are the problematic issues for discussion in this module: "Do you think that in times of war, art can help you express a different range of emotions, influence their processing and stabilise a positive state? Can art be entrusted with the role of a close friend who can provide help and support in difficult life situations? Is it possible to use art to support not only yourself but also your friends, to influence positive communication, to smooth out conflict disputes, etc. Do you believe that through practical work with art you can maintain your mental health? Can a person be happy in times of war?". The answers to these questions will be found in the entire course.

The course we have developed consists of four sections. The first module of the course "Create to Relieve Stress" includes a theoretical block, which reveals the role of art as a tool for stress reduction, relaxation, and the impact on human mental health. This module provides historical facts when art helped people survive during extreme situations. The practical part of the course consists of techniques of self-development through various arts, such as exercises on conveying images with the help of colours, choosing a colour scheme to reflect your emotional state, changing your mood. Literary exercises to create poetic texts, or to provide examples of emotional reactions to a life situation, transforming it into a text. Musical exercises to convey your own emotions and then destroy negative feelings and demonstrate a positive emotional state through perception, analysis, and performance of the piece. Conducting self-analysis of your own emotional state after creative exercises. Identifying positive and negative reactions. Reflection to understand how the mood changed in the creative work process through art. Art as a collective therapy, to provide options and examples of organising creative meetings for emotional support of students who also receive education in the territories suffering from military aggression. Real artistic practices in life. To provide students with an understanding that art changes a person for the better if they constantly study it, improve their emotional experience in the process of communicating with the best examples of the cultural heritage of their people and the cultural achievements of other representatives of the world community. After completing the first section of the course, it is necessary to diagnose

the emotional state of students, identify the level of anxiety, whether it has changed since the beginning of work at this stage, highlight the emotional reactions that prevail in students, note the dynamics of emotional changes during communication with art, its perception, performance, and creation of personal creative products.

An example of work on the first module of the course for overcoming stress caused by war can be the mastering of video materials containing an a cappella performance by the leader of the Boombox group, Andriy Khlyvnyuk, of the Sich Riflemen's anthem „Oh, the Red Viburnum in the Meadow,” which he sang on Sophia Square in Kyiv on the second day of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It is advisable to ask students the question: “Why did the performance of the famous song become known far beyond Ukraine?”. It should be noted that the involvement of students in vocal and choral activities in the process of learning, individual and collective performance of this work should become stages of “recovery” for a person who found himself in a situation where „life was turned upside down” “in the first days of the war. Learning the song in an online format can be offered in the form of creating a virtual choir, inviting friends and all people who support Ukrainians to perform the song collectively, creating a performance and using other works that are of interest to young people at this time. For this stage of „accumulation of emotional experience „ during the course, you can expand your emotional preferences by watching video clips on the proposed topics. In our example, listen to a video of Andrii Khvylniuk, where he performs a song dressed as a defender of the territorial defence. For greater awareness, the psychological state that “you are not alone”, at a time when the whole country is in danger, you can get acquainted with a piece that has experienced a new birth and was performed not only by Ukrainian performers but also by the world-famous Pink Floyd, which thus expressed support for Ukrainians. At the initiative of David Gilmour, after a 28-year hiatus, the band released a single with Khvylniuk's vocals and their own arrangement of the song “Oh, there's a Red Viburnum in the Meadow” and donated over UAH 22 million to Ukraine. The video of the famous band begins with the performance of the song by the Hryhoriy Verevka National Choir of Ukraine. This is worth noting because the emotions experienced by the audience when listening to a highly professional collective performance affect their sense of confidence and hope for overcoming the difficulties caused by the war. The audience should pay attention to this. The drums of the famous group feature paintings by Maria Prymachenko (Naïve art; Primitivism), whose a shell hit the house in the first days of the war. The feeling of interaction with other people, involvement

in national identity, belief in victory is an essential factor that increases the positive impact on a person's mood, activity, and desire to move forward. The video clip also demonstrates the synthesis of different art forms, which is becoming an essential component of young people's perception of the world around them, and the ability to switch from one art form to another (from vocal performance to the possibility of creating a video on the chosen topic, instrumental accompaniment and visualisation of images created by the war; the possibility of arranging a well-known melody and combining the stage design of the song with the visual art of M. Pryimachenko). This analysis of artistic works, the opportunity to participate in performances, and the creation of their own version of virtual projects, this movement of emotions will create obstacles to "get stuck" in their experiences, expand their emotional experience, get acquainted with the information field of the chosen topic as thoroughly as possible, pay attention to different types of creative activity, and try to find themselves in each.

Research on various health-saving techniques, which we have incorporated into the course's practical exercises, is of great importance for the development of our course. In the scientific literature, Ukrainian researchers are studying the development of such health-saving methods that could enhance the effectiveness of measures and provide a comprehensive approach to overcoming the problems associated with post-traumatic symptoms of the individual in war. In the studies of Ordatii N. and Angelska V. [Ordatii, Angelska, 2024], we find factors that influence the level of mental health improvement in the context of students' professional training. The researchers propose to take into account the WHO's definition of mental health as a human condition in which a person can be happy; well-being, where a person realises their creative abilities, can withstand life stresses, work productively and contribute to public life.

We are interested in the scientists' emphasis on improving the positive level of mental health and developing the hardiness of students' personalities during their studies with the help of various art methods, among which self-help methods stand out. Examples of practical exercises using health-saving techniques after mastering the artwork analyzed above can be found in the following examples of exercises.

Activity 1: Drawing emotions while reading the poem "Oh, there is a red viburnum in the meadow" Materials: paper, coloured pencils or paints. Description: Create a drawing that reflects your emotions after listening to the piece by different performers (choir, vocalist, instrumental ensemble). Focus your work purely on the sensory sphere through colours and shapes. Aim:

to explore how visual images can reflect and transform the emotional state of a person when listening to the same piece, in different forms and author's interpretations.

Exercise 2: "Breathe freely and calmly" Objective: To reduce stress and anxiety by controlling breathing during vocal work on a song. Description: to get acquainted with the types of vocal breathing, to try to use different types of breathing (chest, diaphragmatic) to perform a piece.

Exercise 3: "Art of the Word Therapy". Description: write a poetic text about your emotions and experiences while listening to the piece, focus on how writing distracts from tension and transfers it to paper. Give the poetic text a musical and intonational characteristic. Sing the poetic text you have created and record how your emotional state has changed after the poetic text has come to life musically. Additional information for the exercise, which can be performed in different ways according to the emotional state, given that musical intonation, has much in common with speech intonation and the degree of intensity of the emotional state can be observed in music and speech in terms of their general pattern. For example, rising intonations can be associated with increasing tension and falling intonations with calmness; therefore, when performing the exercise, pay attention to the emotional reactions of the voice intonation (if you choose upward intonations, the emotional response is active, if you observe passivity in the person's behaviour, they choose asthenic intonations that go down).

Exercise 4 "Gratitude Meditation" Description: for three days, record positive emotions caused in everyday life by various situations for which you would be grateful. Purpose: to reduce anxiety, to focus on a positive outlook on life.

The second module of the course "Art as a Space for Mental Health of Student Youth" involves self-knowledge through the development of emotional intelligence. The goal is to demonstrate to a person the importance of perception and expression of emotions through images embodied in myths, fairy tales and parables; the use of emotions to facilitate thinking and manage one's emotional state, adapt to changing circumstances, and survive. An example of the work could be an analysis of the image of Mavka created by the famous Ukrainian writer Lesya Ukrainka, who wrote the drama-extravaganza *The Forest Song*. The work may already be familiar, but in times of war, the idea of preserving the beauty of feelings between humans, nature and art as the highest manifestation of love any circumstances cannot destroy that takes us to another level of understanding of human psychology. Experiencing the feelings of the protagonist, Mavka can help students learn to be more resilient

and flexible in the face of uncertainty and stress, and to keep hope alive in the struggle for a harmonious, free life. For a more complete work on the image, materials from the ballet “The Forest The song” created by M. Skorulskyi is added. The composer managed to make the “aroma of folk songs and fairy tales” through choreography. Watching the ballet will help students to feel the creative idea of the extravaganza drama in a plastic way. But the work on the emotional embodiment of the main character’s image will not be complete if students do not touch the animation genre, where a full-length 3D animated film *Mavka* was also created in 2023: *The Forest Song*, which travelled far beyond the borders of Ukraine, was translated into 32 languages, and became a worldwide success. This fact has a severe impact on the understanding of the role of Ukrainian national culture in society, the recognition of its uniqueness, depth and hardiness in different circumstances.

To express their personal feelings, students are encouraged to create an image that reflects their emotional state and demonstrate their own “emotional portrait” through various art forms to release negative emotions. At the same time, the results will not be evaluated on a purely artistic level of Improvement. The essential factor is the satisfaction and positive emotions from performing in front of an audience, realising your creative idea, and receiving feedback. Work on critical remarks, further improvement, positive motivation for further creative work, improvement of self-esteem, improvement of the psychological state in the process of creating an image. For example, you can offer to develop a virtual art project, “Modernity of the image of *Mavka* as a source of nature, beauty, and harmony”. We have examples when students worked on this content and presented a variant of fractal graphics that demonstrated the image of *Mavka*, using music programs and colour effects, and was positively received by the student audience in the process of communicating with schoolchildren and students. Among the practical tasks, we can suggest

Exercise 1. “My Mythological Diary” with the aim of learning about your own and other people’s emotions, increasing empathy for the emotions and experiences of others. In the diary, describe daily experiences, emotions, moods, and reactions to events in modern life on behalf of *Mavka*. Reveal experiences related to other people.

Exercise 2: Musical dramatisation of storylines. Develop a storyline, a scenario plan in which *Mavka* interacts with other characters, select musical characteristics for each, and accompany them with poems or fragments of the story or your textual explanations. Aim: to express personal emotions through musical theatre performances (you can use images of other characters from films or works of interest to students).

Exercise 3 “Letter to Mavka”. The purpose: to express your emotional state on paper, addressing the character of the work „The Forest Song”. Write your impressions of the event that affected you, addressing Mavka. As an additional task, you can do Exercise 4, “Getting a response from the nymph”. The purpose: to put yourself in the other person’s shoes, to communicate with them through letters about issues that concern you, to discover a different perspective, to look from a different angles to observe emotions during exercises 3 and 4. Compare how they are similar and how they differ.

Suggest creating a platform, developing a website, or using social media to post works. On the YouTube channel, master classes, and online exhibitions on the theme of “Mavka”. An example of a masterclass on the chosen topic can be found [here](#).

Exercise 5: “Natural feelings” Objective: to get a sense of harmony in communicating with nature. Create a route for an excursion, and you can take a virtual one. Provide “emotional stops”. Different places evoke different emotions. Compare your emotional state with the feelings of Mavka, a creation of nature. Which place made you feel calm, which anxious? Reflect on the changes in emotions. Add music to each stop. Did the music contribute to a positive mood?

The third module of the course is “Regulation of one’s own emotional state by means of art”. It is based on the developments of well-known representatives of art therapy. The essence of the method is not so much to “cure” a person in the medical sense but to indirectly influence their psychosomatic health through art. Among the methods that generally reflect the work on enabling a person to regulate his or her emotional state, two groups can be distinguished [Schwabe, 1986, p. 11]: the first the group is active, including music and movement therapy; a person is personally involved in instrumental improvisation, dance therapy, singing, and movement improvisation to music; and the The second group is communicative, which means communicating with others through art.

Antonova-Turchenko O.G. and Drobot L.S. [Antonova-Turchenko, Drobot, 1997, p. 60] consider the main principles of art therapy to be the organisation of work on stabilising a person’s emotional state according to the so-called iso- and levelling principles. The essence of the iso-principle, using the example of the selection of musical examples is that to achieve the result, it is necessary to go through three stages (adjustment-neutrality-modelling). The essence is that first, fragments are offered for listening that correspond to the current mood of the person, the art is “adjusted”; then, when the person already “trusts” the the emotion that causes the perception

of the work, a neutral musical fragment is offered, and then fragments of a nature that corresponds to the internal state of the recipient, which must be modelled, are listened to. Diagnosing the emotional state is an important starting point for determining the correct emotional trajectory and mood of a person. For such diagnostics, students can be asked to provide a version of a piece that reflects their mood at this stage and describe it according to the scale of “emotional and aesthetic modules” used in music pedagogy to analyse perceived music [Biletska, 2019].

If a person has been diagnosed with anxiety, an example of working with this principle could include listening to a piece by Beethoven (the first movement of the Sonata-Fantasia No. 14 in C sharp minor). Ask the students to listen to the first movement with their eyes closed, focusing on the music, trying to feel „how the composer’s heart was beating” when he was working on the piece, being in love with D. Guichardi. Try to reflect with your applause the movement of the triplets, which are of great importance for the emotional tone of the work in the first movement. An additional task: to convey the composer’s heartbeat through applause, working in a group with other students. Answer the question of why the composer changed the traditional arrangement of the movements in the sonata, preferring the form of fantasy (feelings cannot be put into a framework). The next piece that should help to neutralise the emotional state is Debussy’s *Clair de Lune*. An example of music by an impressionist composers will create a calming mood. For further emotional development, the desire to move; you can listen to Mozart’s “Little Night Serenade” to enjoy life. This work is filled with sunlight will give a person activity, a desire to see the world in vibrant colours, and an active, creative activity. For the final stage, you can choose the work of Ukrainian composer M. Leontovych “*Shchedryk*” (“Carol of the Bells”). This iconic work, which has travelled the world, is performed not only in Ukrainian, English, German, Spanish and Japanese, and is an integral part of the Christmas holidays, has the so-called “happiness.” tone, because Christmas is the emotion of a happy life, joy. After listening to the work, you can offer to share your emotions, feel the joy of people of other nationalities, and try to provide your version of poems or melodies on Christmas themes to capture this level of emotional „lift” from getting to know the famous Ukrainian work.

To implement the level principle of art therapy [Antonova-Turchenko, Drobot, 1997, p. 65], the first illustration of an example of art should arouse interest and stimulate further acquaintance with the following example. The second example of the work should be selected to raise the emotional tone, the authors insist. The final stage of work on the emotional state of a person

is divided into two groups (works of a cheerful or sad nature). This choice is made according to how the audience perceives the artwork and records changes in their emotional state. To diagnose the audience's attitude to work and determine the emotional level of tension and mutual feelings in the team, you can offer an exercise, "hear yourself and others", at the beginning and end of the class.

Everyone should close their eyes, focus on their inner state, find the sound that reflects their mood, and after the teacher says, "here we go", everyone should sing their sound, which was born on the syllable "lo", at the same time. We practised such exercises with the audience, and it was interesting that there were examples when the "audience" sounded very harmonious; it could be chords of tonic triads, in such classrooms classes are held in a friendly atmosphere, and positive communication between students with each other. There were examples when the audience provided a chord demonstrating "cacophony". The classes in such groups were more intense, but in the end, after the teacher took into account for the mood of the group and select the proper methods of work, the sound of this audience it was changed to "harmonious". Sound attunement is an excellent way to improve health, and it was known in the East in ancient times. It would be best if you sang vowels and consonants that are chosen from a list of healing sounds that affect the recovery of human organs. For example, long singing of the vowel "u" strengthens the vocal cords. Heart diseases respond to singing "o", "a", "m", and "i". The well-known sound combination "oh" also lowers blood pressure, etc. Such exercises can be performed in different situations, they do not require high musical abilities, but they can relieve tension, and this also applies to breathing exercises.

The last, fourth module of the course, which can engage students in improving their mental health and developing personal resilience, is the module "Information Environment in Personal Creativity and Artistic Communication," which uses the information environment for artistic communication with the community. There are already initiatives in Ukraine where art has played a significant role in supporting students' mental health. These include art workshops in schools. Many schools in conflict zones have integrated art workshops into their curriculum. These workshops provide a structured environment for students to explore their creativity and share their experiences. Community art projects: local organisations create community art projects, such as mural painting and participatory installations serve as both a form of expression and a way to beautify war-affected areas. Digital art platforms: With the advent of digital technology, online platforms

have emerged that allow students to participate in virtual art communities and competitions. These platforms offer an additional avenue for artistic expression and connection with others.

In this module, we use online materials, trainings, and exercises from the All-Ukrainian Mental Health Program “Are You OK?” (How Are You? Nationwide Mental Health Program), which is being implemented on the initiative of First Lady Olena Zelenska. The online self-help techniques for people affected by the war are valuable for our course, and students also have the opportunity to join this program, because the health of the nation is a matter of victory for our people not only in the war, but also the opportunity to live and work in a happy, prosperous country.

Conclusions

Thus, in the course of our study, we have presented the development of an elective course ‘Art as a Space for the Development of Mental Health of Student Youth’, in which, due to the positive impact of art on the emotional state of a person and the development of resilience. The introduction of the course presented above into the educational process, in our opinion, will help improve the level of hardiness and emotional stability of student youth and will expand the methodological tools of future teachers who plan to work in educational institutions, both in the area of active hostilities and in other territories of Ukraine. Our study provides specific examples of the use of artistic works as representatives of the Ukrainian and European cultural community. A special place in the article is given to examples of art therapy methods for the development of mental health of student youth and the development of personality hardiness, and the principles and methods of working with young people in the context of the war in Ukraine are revealed.

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