



## Reflection

# Applications of Archetypal Art Therapy Techniques in School Counselling

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## Abstract:

Archetypes are universal symbolic images present in the collective unconscious of every individual. In children, these archetypes can manifest through play, fantasies, dreams, and artistic projects. Art therapy provides children with the opportunity to explore these images and express their internal experiences and conflicts through creativity. For example, the archetype of the mother can be expressed in a child's drawing depicting their connection to a caring adult or feelings of loss and separation. In the article I explore how the archetypes of Shadow and Magician (wise person, wizard, healer) enables adolescents to become aware of their inner resources and find new strategies for responding to life's challenges.



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## 1. Introduction

The modern world is changing rapidly and dramatically. Children are not only witnesses to the challenges of the contemporary world but also participants in complex global processes such as pandemics, international conflicts, the high pace and speed of life, political and economic instability, and so on. All these processes inevitably impact the psychological climate of families and the well-being of adults, which, in turn, affects the mental health of children.

Wellbeing and raising awareness about mental health among children is a strategic goal of "Haileybury Astana," the first international school in Kazakhstan. We teach children that mental health is just as important as physical health and that it is crucial to understand their own mental health and how best to take care of it. As a school psychologist, I think that mental health is just as important as physical health and that it is crucial for children to understand their own mental health and how best to take care of it. Here I share my experience on how archetypal art therapy helps in individual and group counselling with children at school. This article explores how the archetypes of the Shadow and the Magician (wise person, wizard, healer) enable adolescents to become aware of their inner resources and discover new strategies for responding to life's challenges.

## 2. Diagnostics and psycho-correction effects of archetypal art-therapy in counselling pupils

The main issues for which children seek psychological consultations and meetings include problems related to low academic achievements and abilities, misbehaviour in class such as indiscipline and disobedience, communication and relationship issues with peers including conflicts, low mood, lack of interest and motivation to study, low participation and class engagement, self-image and self-assessment, self-confidence, eating disorders, and addiction to electronic devices. Pupils experience a high workload in high school, with a challenging curriculum and a large volume of material for independent study and homework. In addition, there are daily scheduled clubs, sports sections, and extra lessons with tutors. All of this often leaves insufficient time for leisure, hobbies, and socializing with peers, leading to emotional breakdowns, occasional bouts of aggression, or apathetic and depressive states. Consequently, these issues are symptoms of deeper psychological problems such as: feelings of insecurity and anxiety, feelings of guilt and obligations towards parents, perfectionism and excessive efforts to meet expectations. Burnout and demotivation in senior school children.

This article explores how the archetypes of the Shadow and the Magician (wise person, wizard, healer) enable adolescents to become aware of their inner resources and discover new strategies for responding to life's challenges.

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In these conditions, the presence of sufficient emotional support from adults, the existence of trusting relationships with adults, and the ability to seek and receive support from peers, parents, teachers and specialists become critically important.

Art therapy is an excellent method for working with children of different ages, serving both as a diagnostic tool and a corrective mechanism without intensive interventions from the psychologist. The creative process during activities such as drawing, sculpting, and sand play helps children express their feelings in a non-verbal, softer, and more natural way, allowing them to externalize and explore their internal conflicts. The creative process can have a calming effect, helping children relax and reduce their levels of stress and anxiety.



Archetypal art therapy has proven to be very effective psychological tool in art therapy for pupils because it closely aligns with fairy tale and mythical themes and images, allowing children to create their own stories using archetypal images and symbols (Abbenante & Wix, 2015).

Archetypal art therapy is based on Carl Gustav Jung's theory of 12 archetypes, which are recognized as universal images of the collective unconscious and manifest in myths, legends, dreams, and art. (Martin, 2018). According to Carl Jung (1977), an archetype is akin to a human instinct that regulates psychic life and controls human behaviour at a biological level. In other words, it is an internal regulator of psychic life that determines the quality and nature of mental processes. Thanks to archetypes, people react, experience, and act in a specific manner. An important characteristic of archetypes is their unconscious nature. The opportunity to become aware of inherent or innate patterns arises during exploration in art therapy at the archetypal level.

The possibilities of art therapy in working with children include the use of the following techniques according to Allan and Clark (1985).

- Depicting Archetypal Images: for example, using techniques like the Hero's Journey, Conversations with the Shadow, and Inner Healer (Sage).
- "Mask, I Know You": creating masks through techniques like drawing, sculpting, and papier-mâché.
- "Fairy Tale in the Sand": creating stories using figures and toys that include archetypal elements.
- Creating Mandalas: drawing mandalas with pencils, paints, using colouring books, and incorporating stones.
- "Stone Garden": Stone therapy, which allows for the recreation of scenes and stories through archetypal symbols.

Below are examples of how art therapy can be used through Shadow Archetype and Magician Archetype in individual counselling with schoolchildren.

### 3. Results and Discussion: Cases

Drawings of the children that were subjected to counseling are shown in **Figure 1**. Written consent has been obtained by the children and their parents to publish the images.

#### 3.1 Case 1

Girl H, 8 years old. was referred for counselling by her parents. The problem under investigation: panic fear of entering school in the morning. Individual sessions using archetypal art therapy explored the figure of fear (Shadow Archetype). The girl painted her fear in the form of a dark frightening figure (**Figure 1A**), which she interpreted as a man who is very strong and does not let her into school, because she could not get the certificate of the best pupil in a term. Subsequently, during several meetings and the compilation of a story about the Shadow, as well as the physical accompaniment of the girl in the morning to the class, the problem of fear and rejection was resolved, also as a result of family therapy with parents.

#### 3.2 Case 2

Girl S, 10 years old, was sent to psychological support by teachers as she refused to go to lunch to the school canteen. However, she was willing to eat if the food was brought to her to the classroom at recess. At an individual meeting, the girl described her condition at entering the dining room as weakness, powerlessness and fatigue. She was asked to draw this state of weakness and fatigue. She drew her head (**Figure 1 B1 and B2**) and composed a fairy tale about many small people appearing in her head who begin to march and make noise when she enters the dining room (Пороцова, 2006). When compiling a story about what these people want, the girl composed a story that these little people are from another planet, and that they want to get out of her head and fly back to their planet. After a series of meetings with the use of figurative art therapy, the girl managed to cope with her problem.

#### 3.3 Case 3

**Figure 1C** shows an image of a figure of fear of a girl who experienced sadness and grief over the loss of her grandmother.

### 3.4. Case 4

**Figure 1D** shows an image of the Shadow archetype called the Pest which periodically caused girl S abdominal pain.

In all cases, working in the technique of archetypal art therapy helped children to create stories reflecting their inner experiences and externalize emotions in the form of images and symbols, which means seeing their separation from these images and then, performing transformative actions with them that led to more adaptive behaviour.



**Figure 1.** Images drawn by A: Case 1 girl, B1 and B2: Case 2 girl, C: Case 3 girl and D: Case 4 girl.

One of the favorite archetypal techniques is the practice of "Inner Healer," which has proven itself well during a pandemic. This resource practice allows to turn to internal forces and consciously dispose of them in moments of difficult situations.

The materials applied for archetypal art-therapy are paper, liquid oil and ear cleaning sticks. Pupils are asked to draw random lines for half a minute, just scratch on a piece of paper with a cotton swab without any idea to depict something. Then the resulting picture is viewed in a mode resembling assessment of an X-ray image. In the random lines, the Inner Healer is sought to manifest himself, or – his message is manifested to suggest what is best for the subject at the given point and what will help him/her to heal.



Children with great pleasure come into contact with an Inner Healer, create and interpret images and symbols regarding him, and decipher his messages. Thus, contact is made with an internal unconscious resource, which acquires clear features and images children's own strength. The author of the drawing presented in **Figure 2** claimed that he would never have been able to arbitrarily draw the image by himself, but with the help of the technique of the Internal Healer, he was able to identify and prioritize his actual needs.



**Figure 2.** Illustration of the Inner Healer in the form of a smart and cheerful elephant, reminding of the importance of daily routine and hygiene and performing physical exercises.

#### 4. Conclusions

Thus, the attractiveness of the psycho-correction method based on archetypal art therapy with children is based on the following provisions: lack of teaching and moralizing; safe space and psychological security in contact with the adult; imagery, fabulousness and metaphorical language; the presence of mystery and magic. The use of elements of archetypal art therapy helps to understand a child's inner world, explore their true experiences and resources, and integrate unconscious deep elements of the psyche.

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**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.



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