

Educational art-based play as a tool for bullying prevention and psychosocial skill development: A systematic review of school-based interventions

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Abstract

The prevention of school bullying represents a major challenge for contemporary educational systems, given its significant implications for students' psychological well-being, social adjustment, and educational outcomes. In recent years, increasing attention has been devoted to preventive educational approaches that emphasize social-emotional development, creativity, experiential learning, and positive school climate. Within this context, educational art-based play has emerged as a promising interdisciplinary approach that combines the developmental benefits of play with the expressive, symbolic, and collaborative dimensions of artistic activities. The present systematic review aims to examine and synthesize existing evidence regarding the role of educational art-based play interventions in bullying prevention and psychosocial skill development within school settings. A systematic search of the literature was conducted using major academic databases, including Scopus, PsycINFO, ERIC, and Google Scholar, focusing on studies published between 2010 and 2024. The selected studies were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings identified five major thematic areas through which educational art-based play interventions may contribute to psychosocial development and bullying prevention: (a) emotional regulation and anxiety reduction, (b) empathy development and perspective-taking, (c) social cohesion and positive school climate, (d) identity formation, self-esteem, and resilience, and (e) creative conflict resolution and cooperative problem-solving. The reviewed literature suggests that educational art-based play interventions facilitate emotional expression, social participation, experiential learning, and collaborative meaning-making, thereby promoting protective psychosocial factors associated with reduced bullying behaviors and improved student well-being. The findings support the integration of educational art-based play within school-based prevention programs and social-emotional learning initiatives and highlight its potential contribution to the development of safer, more inclusive, and emotionally supportive educational environments.

Keywords: Educational Art-Based Play, Bullying Prevention, Psychosocial Development, Social-Emotional Learning, School Climate, Arts Education.

1. Introduction

Bullying in school settings constitutes a major psychosocial and educational concern worldwide, with substantial implications for students' emotional well-being, social functioning, academic performance, and long-term psychological adjustment (Olweus, 1993; Arseneault, 2018; Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Defined as repeated aggressive behavior involving an imbalance of power between perpetrators and victims, bullying extends beyond individual interactions and influences the broader social and educational environment of schools (Espelage & Swearer, 2010; Smith & Low, 2013). Research has consistently demonstrated that students who experience victimization are at increased risk for anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, loneliness, and reduced academic engagement, while students involved in



bullying behaviors frequently exhibit difficulties in emotional regulation and interpersonal functioning (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013; Salmivalli, 2014).

In recent years, increasing attention has been devoted to ecological and preventive approaches that address the social and emotional dimensions of school life rather than focusing exclusively on behavioral management strategies. Within this perspective, school climate has emerged as a key protective factor against bullying and psychosocial maladjustment. Positive school climates characterized by trust, inclusion, emotional support, and student participation have been associated with reduced bullying behaviors, greater school connectedness, and improved psychological well-being (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Johnson, 2015; Wang & Degol, 2016).

Similarly, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks have increasingly been recognized as effective approaches for promoting emotional competence, interpersonal relationships, and psychosocial adjustment in educational settings (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). SEL interventions aim to strengthen core competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, contributing not only to improved social and emotional functioning but also to the creation of safer and more inclusive school environments (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017).

Accordingly, educational approaches that integrate creativity, experiential learning, and social participation have attracted increasing scholarly interest. Educational art-based play represents an interdisciplinary framework that combines the developmental functions of play with the expressive and symbolic capacities of artistic activity (Malchiodi, 2012; Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013). Through collaborative artistic creation, symbolic representation, role-playing, and experiential engagement, students may develop emotional regulation, empathy, resilience, social competence, and interpersonal understanding within psychologically safe educational environments (Eisner, 2002; Karkou & Glasman, 2004; Slayton, D'Archer, & Kaplan, 2010).

Despite growing research on arts education, social-emotional learning, and bullying prevention, relatively limited attention has been devoted to the integrated role of educational art-based play as a school-based psychosocial intervention. Existing research frequently examines artistic activities, play-based learning, and bullying prevention separately, highlighting the need for a comprehensive synthesis of the mechanisms through which educational art-based play may contribute to psychosocial development and bullying prevention.

Therefore, the aim of the present systematic review is to examine and synthesize existing evidence regarding the role of educational art-based play as a preventive and empowering educational approach for bullying prevention and psychosocial skill development in school settings. Specifically, this review seeks to identify the psychological, social, and educational mechanisms through which art-based play interventions may contribute to emotional regulation, empathy development, social cohesion, resilience, and the promotion of positive school environments.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Educational art-based play and experiential learning

Educational art-based play constitutes an interdisciplinary educational approach that combines the developmental, social, and emotional functions of play with the expressive, symbolic, and reflective capacities of artistic activity. Rather than conceptualizing art and play



as distinct pedagogical practices, contemporary educational and developmental theories increasingly emphasize their complementary contribution to experiential learning, psychosocial development, and emotional well-being (Eisner, 2002; Malchiodi, 2012).

Experiential learning theories propose that meaningful learning occurs through active participation, reflection, and the construction of personal meaning from experience (Kolb, 1984). Within educational settings, experiential activities engage learners cognitively, emotionally, socially, and creatively, thereby facilitating deeper understanding and personal growth. Educational art-based play aligns closely with this perspective by providing opportunities for students to explore emotions, relationships, identities, and social situations through symbolic and creative experiences (Kolb, 1984; Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013).

Play has long been recognized as a fundamental developmental process through which children explore social roles, experiment with behaviors, and construct meaning within safe and supportive environments. Through symbolic play, role-taking, and collaborative activities, children develop perspective-taking abilities, emotional understanding, self-regulation, and social competence (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Pellegrini, 2009). Similarly, artistic expression provides a symbolic medium through which children and adolescents can externalize emotions, construct personal narratives, and process experiences that may be difficult to articulate verbally (Malchiodi, 2012). Participation in artistic activities has also been associated with increased self-efficacy, emotional resilience, and psychological well-being (Slayton, D'Archer, & Kaplan, 2010).

The integration of art and play creates educational environments characterized by creativity, emotional safety, symbolic expression, and collaborative participation. Such environments encourage experimentation, emotional exploration, empathy development, and interpersonal learning while supporting the acquisition of core social-emotional competencies, including self-awareness, emotional regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Durlak et al., 2011; CASEL, 2020).

Consequently, educational art-based play may represent a particularly promising framework for school-based prevention programs, as it simultaneously addresses emotional, social, and educational dimensions of children's development while strengthening protective factors associated with psychosocial well-being and bullying prevention.

2.2. Arts education and psychosocial development

The relationship between arts education and psychosocial development has attracted increasing scholarly attention over recent decades. Beyond their aesthetic and cognitive functions, artistic activities have been recognized as important tools for emotional expression, social interaction, identity formation, and psychological well-being (Eisner, 2002; Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013). Contemporary educational perspectives increasingly conceptualize arts participation as a multidimensional developmental experience that contributes to children's social and emotional growth.

One of the most significant contributions of arts education concerns its capacity to facilitate emotional expression and emotional regulation. Artistic activities provide students with symbolic means through which they can externalize emotions, process experiences, and construct personal meaning in ways that may not be easily achieved through verbal communication alone (Malchiodi, 2012). Research suggests that participation in arts-based educational interventions may reduce emotional distress and anxiety while promoting



psychological resilience, adaptive coping mechanisms, and emotional well-being (Slayton, D'Archer, & Kaplan, 2010; Hendricks, Pappas, & Taylor, 2018).

In addition to emotional benefits, arts education contributes to the development of social competencies through collaborative participation, communication, negotiation, and perspective-taking processes (Karkou & Glasman, 2004). Artistic creation also supports identity formation and self-concept development by encouraging children and adolescents to explore personal experiences, values, and social roles, thereby strengthening self-esteem and psychological resilience (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987). Furthermore, recent educational approaches have highlighted the value of arts-based interventions within trauma-informed and social-emotional educational frameworks due to their capacity to promote emotional safety, interpersonal trust, and resilience-building (Malchiodi, 2012).

Taken together, the existing literature suggests that arts education contributes to psychosocial development through multiple interconnected mechanisms, including emotional expression, social participation, identity development, resilience enhancement, and the promotion of positive interpersonal relationships. These characteristics make artistic activities particularly suitable for integration into school-based bullying prevention and psychosocial intervention programs.

2.3. Educational art-based play interventions in school settings

Educational art-based play interventions encompass a wide range of collaborative, experiential, and creative activities designed to promote emotional well-being, social competence, and positive peer relationships. Although implementation varies across educational contexts, several intervention approaches appear particularly relevant to bullying prevention and psychosocial development.

Collaborative visual arts projects and mural creation represent one of the most frequently reported practices. Such activities encourage students to work collectively toward shared goals while constructing symbolic representations of belonging, inclusion, empathy, and social connectedness. Participation in collaborative artistic production has been associated with increased peer support, group cohesion, and improved interpersonal relationships (Karkou & Glasman, 2004).

Another important intervention approach combines dramatic play with visual artistic elements, allowing students to explore interpersonal experiences and social roles through symbolic representation. Activities involving masks, role-playing, costumes, and visual narratives provide opportunities to examine experiences of victimization, aggression, empathy, and bystander behavior within psychologically safe educational environments (Malchiodi, 2012). Similarly, experiential emotional workshops, such as the creation of “friendship shields”, “trust walls”, and collaborative emotional narratives, encourage emotional expression, emotional regulation, and the development of supportive classroom climates (Hendricks et al., 2018).

Finally, creative conflict resolution activities utilize collaborative storytelling, visual narratives, and artistic problem-solving tasks to promote communication, negotiation, perspective-taking, and adaptive conflict management strategies (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Despite differences in implementation, these interventions share several core characteristics, including active participation, symbolic expression, collaboration, emotional safety, and experiential learning. Consequently, educational art-based play interventions may be conceptualized as multidimensional educational practices that simultaneously promote psychosocial development, social inclusion, and bullying prevention.



3. Methodology

3.1. Review design

The present study employed a systematic literature review approach to investigate the role of educational art-based play in bullying prevention and psychosocial skill development within school settings. Systematic reviews aim to identify, critically evaluate, and synthesize existing evidence in a transparent and structured manner, allowing researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding of complex educational and psychosocial phenomena (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

Given the interdisciplinary nature of educational art-based play, which integrates concepts from educational psychology, arts education, social-emotional learning, and bullying prevention research, a systematic review approach was considered particularly appropriate. This methodology enables the identification of recurring patterns, theoretical perspectives, intervention strategies, and psychosocial outcomes across diverse educational contexts. The review was guided by the following research question: How do educational art-based play interventions contribute to bullying prevention and psychosocial skill development in school settings? More specifically, the review sought to identify the psychological, social, and educational mechanisms through which art-based play interventions may promote emotional regulation, empathy, social connectedness, resilience, and positive school climate.

3.2. Search Strategy

A systematic search of the literature was conducted using multiple international scientific databases, including Scopus, PsycINFO, ERIC, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected due to their extensive coverage of educational, psychological, and interdisciplinary research.

The literature search focused on publications appearing between 2010 and 2024, allowing for the inclusion of both foundational and contemporary research on bullying prevention, social-emotional learning, arts education, and play-based educational interventions. Combinations of the following keywords and search terms were used: educational art-based play, art-based interventions, arts education, school bullying, bullying prevention, social-emotional learning, psychosocial development, school climate, creative learning, play-based learning, experiential learning, resilience, empathy.

Boolean operators (AND, OR) were employed to combine search terms and optimize retrieval of relevant studies.

3.3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Studies were selected according to predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure methodological consistency and relevance to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria comprised: empirical studies, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and educational intervention studies; publications examining arts-based, play-based, or combined educational interventions; studies focusing on psychosocial outcomes, social-emotional competencies, bullying prevention, or school climate; school-based educational contexts; peer-reviewed articles and academic publications published in English.

The exclusion criteria included:

- studies conducted exclusively in clinical or therapeutic settings without educational applications;
- interventions unrelated to psychosocial development or bullying prevention;
- studies lacking sufficient methodological information;



- conference abstracts, editorials, opinion papers, and unpublished reports.

The selection process emphasized methodological rigor while allowing for the inclusion of diverse educational approaches and intervention designs.

3.4. Data analysis

The selected studies were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was considered particularly suitable because it allows researchers to identify recurring patterns, concepts, and mechanisms across heterogeneous bodies of evidence.

The analysis process involved repeated reading of the selected literature, initial coding of relevant findings, identification of recurring patterns, and the organization of findings into broader thematic categories. Through this iterative analytical process, five major themes emerged:

- Emotional regulation and anxiety reduction;
- Empathy development and perspective-taking;
- Social cohesion and positive school climate;
- Identity formation, self-esteem, and resilience;
- Creative conflict resolution and cooperative problem-solving.

These themes formed the basis for the synthesis and interpretation of findings presented in the results section.

3.5. Conceptual framework

Based on the reviewed literature, a conceptual framework was developed to illustrate the potential mechanisms through which educational art-based play may contribute to bullying prevention and psychosocial development. The proposed framework conceptualizes educational art-based play as a multidimensional educational intervention that promotes emotional expression, empathy development, social connectedness, resilience, and positive school climate, thereby contributing to the prevention of bullying behaviors and the promotion of psychosocial well-being (Figure 1).

The conceptual framework also highlights the interconnected nature of emotional, social, and educational processes involved in art-based play interventions and serves as a theoretical model for interpreting the findings of the present review.

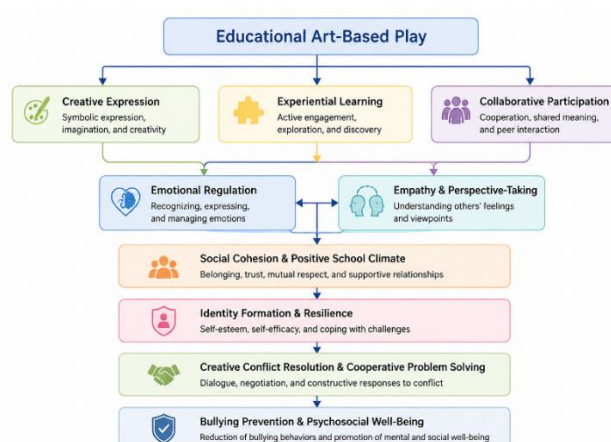


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework illustrating the mechanisms through which educational art-based play interventions may promote psychosocial skill development and contribute to bullying prevention in school settings



3.6. Ethical considerations and methodological limitations

As the present study involved the systematic review and synthesis of previously published literature and did not include the collection of primary data or direct involvement of human participants, formal ethical approval was not required. Nevertheless, the review process adhered to established principles of academic integrity, transparency, and responsible reporting of scientific evidence. All sources were critically evaluated and appropriately acknowledged to ensure methodological rigor and scholarly accuracy.

Also, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of the present review. First, the studies included in the review exhibited substantial heterogeneity regarding intervention design, educational settings, participant characteristics, and outcome measures. This variability limited the possibility of direct comparison across studies and precluded quantitative synthesis.

Second, although efforts were made to conduct a comprehensive literature search, the review was restricted to studies published in English and indexed in selected academic databases, potentially excluding relevant publications from other linguistic and cultural contexts. Furthermore, given the interdisciplinary nature of educational art-based play, the available literature remains fragmented across multiple fields, including educational psychology, arts education, social-emotional learning, and bullying prevention research.

Finally, as this study constitutes a qualitative synthesis of existing literature rather than a primary empirical investigation, causal conclusions regarding the effectiveness of educational art-based play interventions cannot be drawn. Nevertheless, the review provides a comprehensive theoretical and conceptual framework that may inform future empirical research and educational practice.

4. Results

The thematic analysis of the selected literature identified five major themes describing the mechanisms through which educational art-based play interventions may contribute to psychosocial development and bullying prevention in school settings. Although these themes are presented separately for analytical purposes, the findings suggest that they operate through interconnected emotional, social, and educational processes that collectively contribute to the development of safer and more inclusive school environments.

4.1. Emotional regulation and anxiety reduction

One of the most consistently reported findings across the reviewed literature concerns the contribution of educational art-based play to emotional regulation and the reduction of anxiety-related experiences among students. Emotional regulation constitutes a fundamental component of social-emotional development and has been identified as an important protective factor against psychosocial maladjustment, peer victimization, and aggressive behavior (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Artistic and play-based activities appear to facilitate emotional regulation primarily through symbolic expression and experiential engagement. Unlike traditional verbal educational approaches, artistic expression allows children and adolescents to externalize emotions, process stressful experiences, and explore emotional states within psychologically safe and non-threatening environments (Malchiodi, 2012). Through drawing, painting, collaborative artistic production, symbolic play, and creative storytelling, students can express feelings of fear, anxiety, anger, vulnerability, and insecurity that may otherwise remain unarticulated.



Several studies included in this review suggest that participation in arts-based educational interventions is associated with reductions in emotional distress, anxiety symptoms, and psychosocial stress, while simultaneously promoting emotional awareness and adaptive coping strategies (Slayton, D'Archer, & Kaplan, 2010; Hendricks, Pappas, & Taylor, 2018). These findings are particularly relevant in educational environments where students experience social exclusion, interpersonal conflict, or victimization experiences.

From a developmental perspective, playful artistic activities create opportunities for students to experiment with emotions without fear of negative evaluation or social rejection. The symbolic nature of art-based play allows emotional experiences to be represented indirectly, facilitating emotional processing and psychological safety (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Pellegrini, 2009). Furthermore, collaborative artistic activities encourage emotional sharing and peer support, contributing to the normalization of emotional experiences and reducing feelings of isolation.

Within the context of bullying prevention, emotional regulation represents a critical protective mechanism. Students who demonstrate greater emotional awareness and self-regulation skills appear better equipped to cope with interpersonal stressors, seek social support, and manage conflict situations constructively (Durlak et al., 2011). Moreover, emotionally supportive educational environments may reduce the likelihood of aggressive behavior by fostering emotional understanding and psychological safety.

The findings therefore suggest that educational art-based play contributes to bullying prevention not only by addressing behavioral manifestations of aggression but also by strengthening underlying emotional competencies associated with resilience, emotional well-being, and adaptive social functioning.

4.2. Empathy development and perspective-taking

A second major theme emerging from the reviewed literature concerns the role of educational art-based play in promoting empathy, perspective-taking abilities, and social understanding. Empathy has consistently been identified as one of the most important protective factors against aggressive behavior and bullying involvement, as it enables individuals to recognize, understand, and respond appropriately to the emotional experiences of others (Salmivalli, 2014; Hymel & Swearer, 2015).

Educational art-based play appears particularly effective in fostering empathic understanding because it provides opportunities for symbolic role exploration and shared emotional experiences. Through collaborative artistic activities, dramatic play, role-taking exercises, and visual storytelling, students are encouraged to adopt alternative perspectives and engage with experiences that differ from their own (Karkou & Glasman, 2004; Malchiodi, 2012).

One of the most frequently described mechanisms involves the use of symbolic representation and role-playing activities. Educational interventions involving masks, costumes, visual narratives, and dramatic scenarios allow students to explore the experiences of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders within safe educational contexts. Such activities facilitate emotional identification, perspective-taking, and the development of social awareness, all of which constitute essential components of social-emotional competence (CASEL, 2020).

Collaborative artistic activities similarly promote empathic processes by requiring students to negotiate meanings, share experiences, and consider alternative viewpoints. Research suggests that collective artistic production encourages interpersonal understanding,



emotional communication, and social connectedness while simultaneously reducing social distance and prejudice (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Winner et al., 2013).

Furthermore, empathy development through art-based play appears to extend beyond individual emotional understanding and contribute to broader processes of social inclusion and group cohesion. Students participating in collaborative creative activities often report stronger feelings of belonging, increased peer acceptance, and improved interpersonal relationships, factors that have been consistently associated with reduced bullying and victimization (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2016).

These findings support the view that educational art-based play may promote bullying prevention through the cultivation of empathic competencies and perspective-taking abilities, thereby fostering more inclusive, supportive, and emotionally responsive school environments.

4.3. Social cohesion and positive school climate

Another major theme emerging from the reviewed literature concerns the contribution of educational art-based play interventions to the promotion of social cohesion and the development of positive school climates. As previously discussed, school climate constitutes one of the most important protective factors against bullying behavior, as it shapes students' perceptions of safety, belonging, inclusion, and interpersonal support (Thapa et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2016).

Educational art-based play appears particularly effective in fostering social cohesion because it creates opportunities for collaborative participation, shared experiences, and collective meaning-making. Through activities such as collaborative murals, group artistic projects, collective storytelling, and cooperative play scenarios, students engage in processes of communication, negotiation, and shared problem-solving that strengthen interpersonal relationships and group identity (Karkou & Glasman, 2004; Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Collaborative artistic activities appear to promote social inclusion, peer acceptance, and group cohesion by encouraging communication, cooperation, and shared emotional experiences. These processes strengthen social awareness and interpersonal relationships while fostering inclusive and supportive educational environments (Winner et al., 2013; CASEL, 2020). Moreover, the symbolic and creative dimensions of artistic play provide opportunities for students to explore social roles and group identities in ways that promote empathy, inclusion, and social connectedness.

The reviewed literature therefore suggests that educational art-based play interventions may contribute to bullying prevention by strengthening social cohesion and fostering positive school climates characterized by trust, belonging, emotional safety, and supportive interpersonal relationships.

4.4. Identity formation, self-esteem, and resilience

A fourth thematic category identified in the reviewed literature concerns the role of educational art-based play in supporting identity formation, strengthening self-esteem, and promoting psychological resilience. These psychosocial factors have been consistently associated with improved emotional well-being and reduced vulnerability to victimization, social exclusion, and maladaptive coping behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011; Arseneault, 2018).

Artistic creation provides students with opportunities to explore personal experiences, values, emotions, and social identities through symbolic and creative expression. Through drawing, painting, storytelling, role-play, and collaborative artistic production, students can



experiment with different aspects of self-concept and construct meaningful personal narratives (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987; Malchiodi, 2012). Such processes contribute to the development of self-awareness and self-understanding, which constitute essential components of psychosocial development.

Participation in artistic and playful educational activities may strengthen self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resilience by providing opportunities for achievement, emotional expression, and adaptive coping. Creative experiences encourage self-reflection, flexibility, and constructive responses to adversity, thereby supporting long-term psychosocial adjustment and psychological well-being (Slayton et al., 2010; Winner et al., 2013; Hendricks et al., 2018).

In the context of bullying prevention, resilience and positive identity development may function as protective mechanisms by reducing vulnerability to victimization and enhancing students' capacity to respond adaptively to interpersonal challenges. Educational art-based play interventions thus appear to contribute not only to immediate psychosocial outcomes but also to longer-term developmental processes related to psychological well-being and social adjustment.

4.5. Creative conflict resolution and cooperative problem-solving

The final thematic category identified in the reviewed literature concerns the contribution of educational art-based play to creative conflict resolution and cooperative problem-solving skills. These competencies are particularly relevant to bullying prevention because they support constructive interpersonal communication, emotional regulation, and the peaceful management of social conflict (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Educational art-based play interventions frequently employ collaborative storytelling, role-playing activities, visual narratives, and group artistic projects to encourage students to explore interpersonal conflicts and negotiate potential solutions. Such activities provide opportunities for students to examine multiple perspectives, practice communication skills, and develop alternative responses to social challenges (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987; Malchiodi, 2012).

Creative problem-solving activities encourage cognitive flexibility, perspective-taking, communication, and cooperative behavior while helping students develop adaptive responses to interpersonal challenges (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Furthermore, the experiential nature of educational art-based play allows students to rehearse constructive conflict management strategies within psychologically safe environments, thereby strengthening social competence and promoting more peaceful and inclusive school communities.

The findings therefore suggest that educational art-based play interventions contribute to bullying prevention by fostering communication, cooperation, perspective-taking, and constructive conflict management. By providing opportunities for collaborative problem-solving and experiential learning, these interventions may strengthen students' social competence and support positive interpersonal relationships.

5. Discussion

5.1. Integration of findings

The present review sought to examine the role of educational art-based play in promoting psychosocial development and preventing bullying behaviors within school settings. The findings suggest that educational art-based play constitutes a multidimensional educational approach that may influence several interrelated psychological, social, and educational processes associated with student well-being and positive school adjustment.



More specifically, the thematic analysis identified five major areas through which educational art-based play interventions appear to exert their influence: emotional regulation, empathy development, social cohesion, identity formation and resilience, and creative conflict resolution. Although these themes were analyzed separately, the reviewed literature suggests that they operate through dynamic and interconnected mechanisms that collectively contribute to the development of safer, more inclusive, and emotionally supportive educational environments.

One of the most important findings emerging from this review concerns the central role of emotional and social competencies in bullying prevention. Consistent with contemporary social-emotional learning frameworks, the reviewed studies indicate that educational interventions emphasizing emotional expression, interpersonal understanding, cooperation, and experiential participation may contribute more effectively to bullying prevention than approaches focusing exclusively on behavioral management or disciplinary practices (Durlak et al., 2011; CASEL, 2020). These findings further support ecological and systemic approaches to bullying prevention, which conceptualize aggressive behavior as a product of broader social and educational environments rather than solely individual characteristics (Espelage & Swearer, 2010; Hymel & Swearer, 2015).

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of creating educational contexts characterized by psychological safety, symbolic expression, and collaborative participation. Educational art-based play appears to facilitate emotional exploration and interpersonal learning through experiential and creative processes that allow students to engage with emotions, social roles, and interpersonal experiences in developmentally appropriate and psychologically safe ways (Eisner, 2002; Malchiodi, 2012).

5.2. Educational and psychosocial mechanisms

The conceptual framework proposed in the present review suggests that the effectiveness of educational art-based play interventions may be understood through the interaction of several complementary mechanisms. First, artistic and playful activities provide opportunities for symbolic expression, allowing students to externalize emotions and experiences that may otherwise remain difficult to communicate verbally (Malchiodi, 2012). This process contributes to emotional regulation and psychological well-being by facilitating emotional processing and self-understanding.

Second, educational art-based play promotes experiential learning and active participation, enabling students to develop social and emotional competencies through direct engagement rather than passive instruction (Kolb, 1984). Through collaborative artistic creation, dramatic role-play, and experiential activities, students actively construct social knowledge, explore interpersonal relationships, and develop perspective-taking abilities.

Third, collaborative artistic activities foster interpersonal connectedness and collective meaning-making. Shared creative experiences encourage cooperation, empathy, social participation, and mutual recognition, thereby strengthening protective factors associated with positive school climate and bullying prevention (Karkou & Glasman, 2004; Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Taken together, these mechanisms suggest that educational art-based play interventions operate simultaneously at emotional, interpersonal, and educational levels. Rather than targeting isolated behaviors, such interventions may promote broader psychosocial competencies that contribute to resilience, social inclusion, and psychological well-being.



5.3. Practical implications for educators and school psychologists

The findings of the present review have several implications for educational practice and school mental health promotion. First, educational art-based play interventions may represent valuable components of comprehensive school-based bullying prevention programs, particularly when integrated within broader social-emotional learning frameworks. Teachers may incorporate collaborative artistic activities, creative storytelling, role-playing exercises, and experiential emotional workshops into everyday classroom practice to promote empathy, emotional expression, and social connectedness. Such approaches may be especially useful in fostering inclusive classroom environments and strengthening students' sense of belonging and psychological safety.

In addition, school psychologists and mental health professionals may utilize educational art-based play interventions as preventive and supportive tools within school communities. Group-based artistic and playful activities can facilitate emotional expression, strengthen resilience, support conflict resolution, and promote positive peer interactions, particularly among students experiencing psychosocial difficulties or social exclusion.

Finally, the implementation of educational art-based play interventions highlights the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration among educators, school psychologists, counselors, and arts professionals. Such collaboration may contribute to the development of more holistic educational environments that promote both academic learning and psychosocial well-being.

6. Conclusions

The present systematic review examined the potential contribution of educational art-based play interventions to bullying prevention and psychosocial skill development in school settings. The findings suggest that educational art-based play constitutes a promising interdisciplinary educational approach capable of supporting emotional, social, and psychological development through experiential, creative, and collaborative learning processes.

The reviewed literature indicates that educational art-based play interventions may contribute to the enhancement of emotional regulation, empathy development, social cohesion, identity formation, resilience, and constructive conflict resolution. These psychosocial competencies appear to function as important protective factors against bullying behaviors while simultaneously promoting psychological well-being, social inclusion, and positive school climate. Importantly, the findings support contemporary ecological and social-emotional perspectives that conceptualize bullying prevention as a multidimensional educational process rather than solely a behavioral intervention.

Furthermore, the present review highlights the value of integrating artistic expression, symbolic play, and experiential learning within educational environments. By creating psychologically safe spaces for creativity, collaboration, and emotional exploration, educational art-based play interventions may facilitate meaningful psychosocial learning experiences that extend beyond traditional classroom instruction.

The proposed conceptual framework contributes to the existing literature by providing an integrative model that illustrates the psychological, social, and educational mechanisms through which educational art-based play may promote psychosocial competencies and contribute to bullying prevention. This framework may serve as a useful foundation for future empirical investigations and intervention development. Further longitudinal and experimental research is needed to clarify the long-term effectiveness and underlying mechanisms of



educational art-based play interventions across diverse educational contexts and developmental stages.

Overall, the findings of the present review support the integration of educational art-based play within school-based psychosocial and preventive interventions. By combining creativity, experiential learning, emotional expression, and collaborative participation, educational art-based play may contribute to the development of more inclusive, supportive, and psychologically safe educational environments. Consequently, this approach represents a promising framework for promoting both bullying prevention and psychosocial well-being in contemporary educational settings.

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