A dialog with five art materials: Creators share their art making experiences

Sharon Snir, Ph.D., ATR\textsuperscript{a,b,*}\textsuperscript{1}, Dafna Regev, Ph.D., ATR\textsuperscript{b,c}\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{a} Department of Education, Tel Hai Academic College, Upper Galilee, Israel
\textsuperscript{b} The Graduate School of Creative Art Therapies, University of Haifa, Israel
\textsuperscript{c} Emil Sagol C.A.T. Research Center, University of Haifa, Israel

\textbf{A R T I C L E  I N F O}

\textbf{Keywords:}
Art-materials
Qualitative research

\textbf{A B S T R A C T}

Art materials constitute the basis for art therapy interventions. It is essential for therapists to be familiar with and cognizant of the qualities of the different materials they offer to clients and the potential responses the engagement with them may evoke. The purpose of the present research was to examine the responses to art materials by means of reflections written by 120 students after working with five different materials. A random sample of 30 reflections was collected for each material and analyzed by two judges. The analysis produced four main themes: the initial reactions of the participants before working with the material; their perceptions of and reactions to the material during their work with it, their attitudes toward the art products, and the childhood memories that emerged during their work. The findings highlight the importance of understanding the significance of interventions using different art materials in clinical settings.

\textcopyright 2012 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

\section*{Introduction}

Art materials serve as the basic components of the language spoken in the process of art therapy. The dialog created with the help of the materials creates a window to the inner experiences and as a result, an encounter between the client engaged in the art and the therapist and within the artist him or herself (Sotto, 2008). Thus art materials play a central role in our work as art therapists, and our understanding of the therapeutic potential of each material and its unique “personality” is significant to the ability to design suitable interventions for clients (Malchiodi, 2006).

Moon (2010) stated that we can find references to theories that addressed the subject of materials from developmental, psycho-dynamic, systems and relational theories. The most sophisticated theory of material use in the field of art therapy is the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) (Kagin & Lusebrink, 1978; Lusebrink, 1992; Lusebrink, 1990). This theory provides a systematic approach to understand the relationship between client and materials. The model consists of four levels organized in a developmental sequence of image formation and information processing. The first three are presented as continuums: the kinesthetic/sensory level, the perceptual/affective level, and the cognitive/symbolic level. The fourth level, the creative level, can be present at any of the previous levels and may involve a synthesis of all the other levels.

It seems that there is widespread agreement among theorists and clinicians alike that familiarity with art materials is an essential component of any therapeutic intervention based on art. However, as in many other aspects of the field of art therapy, systematic documentation of the potential of response, growth, and expression that the different art materials offer those using them began only recently. The purpose of the present research is to present a systematic documentation of the reactions of clients engaged in art to different art materials, in an attempt to outline the potential responses offered by each respective material, with the aim of furthering our understanding of this potential and applying it in art therapy interventions.

This research focuses on the responses of the research participants to five basic art materials that can be found in almost any art therapy clinic: felt-tipped markers, oil pastels, gouache paint, finger paint, and clay.

\textit{Felt-tipped markers}

Work with markers is characterized by clear lines and powerful, clear-cut colors (Orbach & Galkin, 1997). It is difficult to erase work done in marker or to manipulate the tones produced with them, but the work process is enjoyable. Markers are easy to use and can be used to create attractive, colorful, ornamental, and esthetic results without much effort (Malchiodi, 2006). Markers can be used to create superficial work without emotional involvement or cognitive load (Orbach & Galkin, 1997).