

- 🌀 **Name of the study:** Theoretical Working Model of Art Therapy for Adults with Intellectual Developmental Disabilities
- 🌀 **Year:** 2022
- 🌀 **Catalog Number:** 890-165-2019
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## Abstract

Historically, people with Intellectual Developmental Disabilities (IDD) were seen as unsuitable for psychotherapy, which is based on cognitive abilities and verbal discourse. However, in recent years, there is evidence that people with IDD are able to engage in the therapeutic process. New approaches in psychotherapy may be better adapted to clients with IDD. For example, art therapy provides clients with a space for emotional expression, and the opportunity to communicate in non-verbal ways, which encourages symbolic thinking and helps develop social skills. Today, as part of the care and support of people with IDD in the public health, welfare and education frameworks, they often also receive art therapy.

However, there is scant research or publications dealing with art therapy for people with IDD and hence little dissemination to therapists working in the field with this population who would benefit from access to solutions to cope with the many dilemmas and challenges they face. Working with people with IDD involves incorporating specific features to the therapeutic work, some of which are challenging and complex. This underscores the need to document and conceptualize the work methods and the factors that enter into the therapeutic process with this population.

In this study, we sought to gather knowledge in the field, to achieve a more in-depth sense of the specificity of the therapeutic process and work with this population, and then formulate a theoretical working model that conceptualizes these features, and which could provide potential solutions for art therapists working with this population. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to apply qualitative tools to better understand the specific characteristics of individual art therapy for adults with mild to moderate IDD from the point of view of the art therapists working with them.

This study focused on art therapy for adults (18-45) with IDD, and the research participants were art therapists who work with clients with IDD in this age range. We initially applied the "Consensual Qualitative Research" method which is based on qualitative content

analysis and emphasizes the consensus component. However, the preliminary data collection from the interview transcripts and later the focus groups revealed that the themes more closely related to aspects of the therapeutic process, the factors involved and the connections between them. For this reason, we switched to “Grounded Theory”, while maintaining the principle of consensus throughout the process. Three different procedures were used: (1) Semi-structured one-on-one interviews with 18 art therapists, to find out more about the challenges they face, the therapeutic goals in their work, their ways of working, interventions, the meaning of art-making for the clients, and factors of change and development in treatment; (2) Focus groups to conceptualize the working model; (3) Diaries that the art therapists kept during therapy where they documented their work.

Five main categories emerged, each of which deals with a specific aspect of the therapeutic work, which together express the main components and factors that exist and influence each other within art therapy with adults with IDD. These are (a) The therapeutic position, (b) Challenges and dilemmas in the therapeutic work, (c) Factors that help art therapists deal with these challenges, (d) Therapeutic work practices and (e) The change processes. These five categories make up the theoretical model that was generated from the findings by conceptualizing the main themes in each of the categories. The model emphasizes the central position of art therapists who work with adults with IDD, while also relating to the different approaches that arise from it. The model documents the challenges that arise in treating clients from this population. In order to successfully deal with these challenges, the participants suggested three main directions: tailored supervision, internal coping strategies and cooperation with the team and the client's accompanying environment. The main practices that characterize the therapeutic work with this population were conceptualized from the experiences of the participants. The final category refers to the change processes, which are characterized by the slow pace of the therapeutic work, learning to ascribe great importance to small changes that take place in the treatment, as well as the definition of changes that can be attributed to progress or success in the treatment process.

Overall, the goal of this study was to promote the dissemination of theoretical knowledge on the subject of art therapy for adults with IDD. The model expands and deepens knowledge in the field, and conceptualizes it into a theoretical working model that can be applied in the field and investigated in follow-up studies to further enrich this important research field. This study should be of value to personnel working in the field, and for researchers who aim to examine the effectiveness of treatment and the factors that influence the degree of effectiveness.

## Keywords

Keywords: Developmental intellectual disability, therapy through art, semi-structured in-depth interview, focus groups, treatment diaries.

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