

Contemporary Art Therapy with Transient Youth

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Introduction

This chapter examines how contemporary art therapy theoretical approaches can inform art therapy with adolescents and young people. Both narrative (White and Epston 1989) and brief solution-focused approaches (Berg and Miller 1992; Cade and O'Hanlon 1993; de Shazer 1982) are discussed as offering useful postmodern theoretical frameworks to art therapy. When working with adolescents, these contemporary approaches depathologise client presentation and enhance therapeutic processes of co-construction, where client and therapist work together. Through visual and verbal dialogue, the art therapist engages with the young person, utilising post-structuralist models so that immediate reality is shared. The emphasis is on how these models are used collaboratively when applied to the production of artwork in therapy. This is demonstrated through art therapy work conducted with young people who are at risk of adopting a transient lifestyle. Conservative opinion would regard this group of teenagers as socially unacceptable and as exhibiting problems that hinder adolescent development. The art therapist can engage the young person's knowledge of the problem and co-construct a future-focused outcome or a new narrative that acknowledges the client's expertise. A new perspective is concretised and visually enhanced through expressive art therapy. A post-structuralist perspective is gained in treatment through utilising the client knowledge to create a new narrative or to focus on a solution to the problem. Both approaches lift the client out of what is known and familiar and into an 'as if' realm of imagined outcome. 'Art therapists embracing a post-modernist approach become co-creators with their clients in a life of meaningfulness' (Alter-Muri 1998, p.250).