

# recycling the world through art therapy: implementation of ecological ideas in art therapy with children

thesis concept at Kutenai Art Therapy Institute



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This research project focuses on the development of an ecological identity in children (ages 7-10), as well as the value of ecological intention in art therapy treatment generally. It emphasizes the resources by which the awareness of these children to their relatedness to the world can be increased. Furthermore, this project investigates the understanding that these children have of their place in the world through making art with recycled material.

## The concept of reparation

The spiritual aspiration of repairing personal and global environments which have been damaged by pain and misfortune relates to my cultural background. In the Jewish tradition, an ancient Hebrew phrase is "Tikkun-Olam," which translates to "mending the

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*"There is a secret person  
undamaged in every  
individual waiting to  
reconnect with nature."*

Paul Shepard

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world" by repairing or healing the individual inner-self. According to Matlins (2001), "Tikkun-Olam" means to bring about God's rule on earth. In contemporary usage, the phrase refers to the betterment of the world, including the relief of human suffering, the achievement of peace and respect among peoples, and the protection of the planet itself from destruction (Matlins, 2001).

## A discussion of the findings regarding reparation

The re-use of material refers to the process of rearranging and fixing as a course of reparation. This is a metaphor for mending and healing the individual's self. In this study, the process of attaching and decorating the construction material often gives the impression that clients are creating protected and repaired layers. In addition, the process of change

and the supportive setting of the holding environment of the art therapy treatment, aid in the process of reparation. The act of creating art helps to repair and restore the individual's self in a mental and spiritual sense; in other words, it is healing. It is the reparation of personal and global environments, as everything is seen in relation to everything else.

Creating with recycled materials can promote the transformation of negative experiences (such as rejection) into positive ones (such as building). In addition, the child who hasn't had support in developing beyond an earlier stage can re-experience it through a wide variety of ways of manipulating the recycled material, such as tactile sensory experience, the use of cognitive skills, and the naming of objects.

Moreover, reparation was evidenced in this study through the way each child could develop different designs for the same objects. One example is of a child who added different designs to four identical rolls (Shawn, Project #1). The differences between them showed a process of change that led to reparation. These examples of reparation demon-

strate a therapeutic method for healing and growth.

Creating with recycled materials as a process of change in art therapy is similar to the "environmental restoration work" of individuals that bond with the earth. This connection to the earth includes a sense of dignity and belonging, a tolerance for diversity, and an ecological sensibility. On the other hand, part of the process of healing involves releasing of emotions of guilt and shame, grief and despair, loneliness and powerlessness. The work of restoration involves collaborative relationships between people and the nature world, of giving back as well as receiving, a pattern of reciprocity.

The therapeutic process of the individual has potential implications for the environment. There is potentially a spiritual component behind repairing personal environments, as the process of healing the individual inner-self leads to the reparation of global environments and the mending of the world. An underlying goal would be the achievement of peace and respect among peoples, and the protection of the planet itself from destruction. 🌱