Opening the doors of art museums for therapeutic processes

Carolyn Brown Treadon PhD, ATR-BC, LMHC\textsuperscript{a,*},
Marcia Rosal PhD, ATR-BC, LMHC\textsuperscript{b}, Viki D. Thompson Wylder PhD\textsuperscript{c}

\textsuperscript{a} 113 Lynne Marie Drive, Thomasville, GA 31792, USA
\textsuperscript{b} Department of Art Education, Florida State University, 126 Carother’s Hall, Tallahassee, FL 32306, USA
\textsuperscript{c} Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts, Room 250, Fine Arts Building, Tallahassee, FL 32306-1140, USA

Abstract

The art museum, although an arena for education purposes, is still a novel venue for art therapy. However, art therapists are beginning to enter the doors of these institutions and incorporating art objects into treatment options for their clients. Concurrently, museums are searching for ways to widen their audience base and to attract non-traditional populations into their halls. Art therapists can be of great use to museums by bringing non-traditional groups to the museum and museums can be of value to art therapists by providing a rich resource for clients and for art therapy. This article summarizes the impact of the historical aspects of art museums and the role of the art museum educator to assist the art therapist in understanding how to approach art museums for client use. Additionally, an art therapy pilot project is described in which a local art museum was utilized to assist middle school students increase their awareness of the concept of family.

© 2006 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Art therapy; Art museums; Special populations; Therapeutic resources

Publicly funded art museums were founded to enhance the lives of everyday individuals and provide an arena for educational experiences (Hein, 1998). However, these institutions have not traditionally been utilized as a therapeutic venue. Recently, art therapists have ventured into the art museum for therapeutic inspiration (Alter Muri, 1996; Stiles & Mermer-Welly, 1998). To effectively use this environment, art therapists must have a contextual understanding of these institutions (Linesch, 2004).

This article will explore how the art museum can serve as a major resource in art therapy practice. To begin this exploration, a brief historical overview of the establishment of the art museum and art museum education is needed. A similar examination of previous art therapy programs will also establish a framework for using the art museum as an effective therapeutic tool. Finally, a description and evaluation of a pilot project incorporating the art museum and its artifacts into art therapy will be presented.

Development of art museums

Hein (1998), an authority on the history of art museums and art museum education, stated that museums were initially dedicated to preserving precious artifacts and treasured mementos. Reverence was bestowed on museums and their contents, as was a sense that the museum was for the privileged. Collections were often housed in personal
residences and were not open to the public. When museums became public institutions, it became possible for ordinary individuals to view the extraordinary.

The modern concept of the museum formally appeared in Europe during the 1600s with the opening of private collections to members of the community (Ambrose & Paine, 1993). A collection was symbolic of social status; the greater the collection, the more prestige an individual attained. The 18th century saw the evolution of the museum as an institution for the display of objects and the enjoyment of the public (Hein, 1998). The major expansion of museums into significant public institutions occurred in the 19th century.

In contrast, art museums in the United States (US) began their development later under different conditions. “With few exceptions, art museums in the United States are a product of the industrial and commercial expansion that took place after the civil war, principally between 1870 and the Wall Street crash of 1929” (National Art Education Association, 1989, p. 11). Following the onset of the Great Depression, there was a governmental mandate to provide various educational opportunities for the general public. This led to museums’ doors being opened to the ordinary individual in order to help improve their overall well-being and appreciate the benefits of modernization.

For Hein (1998), museums served several basic purposes. For example, he theorized that individuals who design museum programs must accept that audience members will make their own meanings from the information they receive, meanings that mesh with the content of their own lives and what they already know. Also, Hein thought that museums must accept that each visitor will use his or her own learning modality. He advised museums to discern ways to actively nurture audience connections between their lives and the art or artifacts exhibited. Hein found this to be the purview of museum educators and that they should base their work on a set of philosophies that inform educational practices. Jensen (1982) felt that in order to attract and hold audiences, museum programs must relate to the life experiences individuals bring with them.

**Art museum education**

Over the past several decades the focus of art museum education has evolved. The art museum has expanded services to include curriculum development, creation of educational materials, and outreach to teachers and schools (Williams, 1994). With this changing face of the art museum, a dilemma arose as to how to engage both those who frequent the art museum and members of the general public (Mayer, 1998). Consequently, directors, curators, and museum educators continue to grapple with ways to please both groups and to clarify the purpose and philosophy of art museum education.

The philosophies of art museum education are based upon the values the museum promotes, the content it seeks to convey, those it attempts to reach and the methods the museum uses to attain these values (National Art Education Association, 1989). Historically, the art museum was seen as an institution that sought to increase visual literacy through the use of the objects it possessed. This approach to visual education is not uniform throughout art museums and these differences can be found in varying philosophies.

In a landmark paper, Pittman-Gelles (1988) stated that the purpose of art museum education is to enhance the visitor’s ability to understand and appreciate the original works of art and to transfer these experiences into other aspects of visitors’ lives. This placed the viewer as the focus of art museum education. Thus, art museum educators had a new framework for planning and enhancing educational opportunities. The art itself was not the focus, but rather the way the viewer interpreted the art to create a meaningful experience. The experience could then help the individual increase the understanding of his or her own life (Mayer, 1998).

According to Adams, Moreno, Polk, and Buck (2003), this new approach created challenges for art museum educators. They now had to develop new approaches that would allow visitors to interact with the artworks rather than just view them in reverence. Art spaces began to emerge which promoted visitor interaction and at times encouraged visitors to touch museum artifacts.

Art museums were traditionally only visual in nature. However, this is changing. Using models from other museums already incorporating such spaces, art museums delved into creating areas where visitors not only viewed art, but also were able to interact and create art. Adams et al. (2003) examined methods for integrating art objects into spaces of engagement. In these spaces, interaction does not necessarily mean the ability of the visitor to touch and hold artifacts, but may mean a space in which the visitor is able to walk around, view supporting information, and understand the contextual framework for the art.
Using the art museum for personal expression

Since museum educators are dedicated to broadening the audiences that visit museums, two things need to occur. First, the museum must be perceived as having more to offer than preservation and display of objects. For example, museum educators realized the power of art objects to elicit feeling and meaning in addition to stimulating appreciation. Second, the profile of a museum attendee must be expanded to include those from various socioeconomic classes, cultures, and ability levels. Two experimental programs provide examples of recent efforts to open the doors to a broader purpose and a wider audience. These cutting-edge programs inform art therapists on the use of the art museum in their work.

Williams (1994) investigated the role of the museum for personal exploration. As a seasoned museum educator, Williams reflected on alternate ways an art museum could operate after realizing visitors were hesitant to discuss the connection between art objects and life experiences. This led him to create an experimental program using the museum as a tool to find personal meaning.

Williams (1994) experimented with three groups: advanced art history students, graduate level education students, and members of an anti-racist multicultural education discussion group. Using a short course format, each participant was given a task to perform. Williams consulted with psychologists to refine the tasks as well as their wording. One example stated, “Find a work of art that speaks to you on an emotional level. Take time to experience it fully . . . Be aware of changing physical sensations, fleeting thoughts, or memories.” Each participant was provided a different task and asked to explore the gallery independently. When the group reconvened, Williams facilitated a “personal highlights tour,” a process that allowed each participant to discuss the art and his or her responses.

Several participants were surprised by how they were able to find personal connections with works of art. As the group discussed tasks, selected art works, and offered responses, some participants felt intimidated by the discussion with the associated intense feelings. Others found the small group format facilitated speaking about the art in a personal way. Responses from a follow-up questionnaire supported the thesis that this process prompted an uncovering of personal information and emotions.

Williams (1994) found that articulating guidelines and expectations for the personal tour discussions was risky. He did not want the discussions to be perceived as group therapy. Therefore, he introduced the activity as exploratory and then later related experiences to emotions. He also found the facilitator must be sensitive to the individuals speaking about their experiences, but also mindful to time limits so that each person had the opportunity to talk. He observed that participants were generous in their responses and in their respect for other class members.

As an attempt to serve a non-traditional population, the National Gallery of Australia developed Arts for Health, an experimental project that integrated social work, art therapy and Gallery resources. Specifically, Arts for Health was “a gallery based art therapy program designed to assist people with chronic illnesses raise awareness of the link between lifestyle and health, and to develop appreciation of their strengths and resources through creative expression and learning” (Winn, n.d., p. 1). The program was based on the work of Silverman (1989). She outlined three human needs, identified by Maslow, which should be addressed by museums: belongingness, ego/self-esteem, and self-actualization.

According to Winn (n.d.), the art museum offers a wider context for life experiences, provides relief from the sickness role, and is a place of inspiration. Winn emphasized that therapy spaces are private, inaccessible between sessions. The gallery, on the other hand, is a public space and individuals participating in the program were able to visit any time.

The program consisted of eight weekly sessions, each lasting four hours. Each session began with reflection and art-making. Sessions ended with a visit to a gallery or collection room. Participants were encouraged to identify art pieces that specifically related to the art they created. They were encouraged to put themselves into the minds of the artists in order to find potential similarities between their personal experiences and those of the artists.

Through an evaluation of the program, it was found that participant satisfaction was high. Based on this assessment, Winn surmised that the gallery gained community relevance by addressing the needs of a non-traditional audience.

Utilizing the art museum for personal transformation

Several art therapists have used the art museum and art objects as one aspect of therapy for their clients. When it is not possible for clients to receive treatment in the museum, art history in conjunction with color art reproductions can
support the role of museum objects in art therapy treatment. Alter Muri (1996) presented two case studies in which this combination served as a catalyst for clients seeking out museums to enhance their treatment.

After careful examination of the art of W, a 19-year-old male with a history of learning disabilities, periods of psychotic episodes, bouts of depression, and substance abuse, Alter Muri (1996) showed him slides of artwork by famous artists who used similar imagery. After several weeks of viewing these works, W changed in two noticeable ways: his artwork became more sophisticated and he saw himself as more successful.

Based on W’s success, Alter Muri (1996) began to discuss the lives and art of artists in her group art therapy sessions. Again, she noticed that group members who lacked motivation found the artists’ works as a source of inspiration. She used artists whose styles ranged from cubism and surrealism to outsider art.

W became so engrossed with several of these movements that he sought out library books on artists. As the client transitioned from the day treatment program into outpatient individual sessions, Alter Muri (1996) recommended that he visit art galleries and museums as part of his treatment plan. Aspects of art works W found interesting began to appear in his personal production. The art therapist noted, “Museum and gallery trips seemed to have further increased Client W’s self-esteem and development of identity” (Alter Muri, 1996, p. 104). After several exhibitions of his artwork, W was able to discuss his identity as an artist within the community, not just as a client.

A second case study focused on Mr. H, an individual in his mid-twenties, with developmental delays and behavior problems. Alter Muri (1996) found that Mr. H repetitively drew the same house and often grew discouraged because his landscapes were not realistic. She hypothesized that studying various artists would help him appreciate his own output. Alter Muri found that, “For Mr. H, viewing slides of artwork and going to galleries and museums were a catalyst for changing stereotypical imagery” (Alter Muri, 1996, p. 104). The client was able to accept that his art did not need to be realistic, thus decreasing his level of frustration.

When trust was built between Alter Muri (1996) and Mr. H, visits to museums and galleries became part of the treatment plan. These trips were rewards based on points Mr. H earned for completing tasks and goals. Museum visits provided a motivation for appropriate social behavior. After a few visits, the museum staff realized Mr. H’s love of the art, encouraged him to sit in front of his favorite objects, and persuaded him to draw at the museum. Poor daily living and social skills were transformed as a result of the personal interactions he encountered during museum visits.

Stiles and Mermer-Welly (1998) explored the role of poor self-esteem in early teen pregnancy and found that the art museum, as a component of art therapy, could assist in increasing self-esteem and decreasing problematic symptoms. Teens, aged 13–15, with mild to moderate mental retardation were involved in a school-based intervention program titled The Children and Adolescent Pregnancy Project.

The 28 girls in the project were involved in individual art therapy, family art therapy, group art therapy, and group museum gallery visits. The goals of the project included self-exploration, expression of feelings, problem-solving, self-identification with one’s culture and community, and the reinforcement of relationships within the family. Museum visits occurred monthly at the Toledo Museum of Art and were directed by the museum’s community liaison.

Based on the work of Williams (1994), the liaison used an interactive approach and a multicultural perspective to assist the teens in understanding art objects (Stiles & Mermer-Welly, 1998). The liaison encouraged the girls to tell stories about the art objects, explore media usage, and make connections between the art and their lives. She also challenged them to find meaning in the art and relate the pieces to how they perceived themselves. For example, as a means of exploring the concept of beauty, the teens were asked to examine three objects: Rosetti’s The Salutation, Brancusi’s The Blonde Negress, and an African bronze entitled Votive Head of a Queen Mother. The examination led to a consideration of various viewpoints away from stereotypic constructs.

The museum experience, as one aspect of this project, opened the minds of the teens. The participants became more introspective and learned about themselves through the art objects. Their vision of the world was transformed and they began to see themselves as part of a larger community and culture.

When the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles called to discuss a special exhibition of the work of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, a Holocaust survivor, Debra Linesch was eager to forge a joint relationship (2004). While imprisoned in Terezin, Dicker-Brandeis taught children art and was able to smuggle thousands of drawings from the camp before her transfer to Auschwitz. Surviving images from both Dicker-Brandeis and the children were on exhibition at the museum. Linesch uncovered a statement by Edna Amit, a student of Dicker-Brandeis’, which noted that the Nazis put humans into boxes and Friedl helped them escape, if only for a while. According to Amit, Dicker-Brandeis’ work with the concentration camp children earned her the designation as the first art therapist (Linesch, 2004).
Working in collaboration with the Museum’s Director of Special Exhibits, Linesch (2004) began to envision art therapy experiences offered at the museum. Initially Linesch developed these experiences to coincide with the exhibition. Workshop participants were first exposed to the life of Dicker-Brandeis and her connections with art therapy. Then they were given a tour of the exhibition. Following the tour, participants were invited to create art. They were led into the art room where they were provided with a cigar box and various materials and asked to use Edna Amit’s metaphor to express feeling “boxed in.” The final segment of the workshop occurred in the exhibition, where participants sat among the art pieces to discuss their own work.

After the success of the workshops, Linesch (2004) wanted to explore the incorporation of an expanded art therapy program in the museum. With support from the university, the art therapy program developed a Summer Day Camp experience for middle school students. The day camp was held in conjunction with a museum special exhibition entitled Finding our Families: Finding Ourselves. The art therapy experiences focused on helping students define their personal identities, find their places within their immediate families, and understand their ties to the larger societal family. Activities centered on viewing and understanding the museum exhibitions as well as creating artwork in response to the visits.

The camp lasted 5 days. Mornings were spent looking at different exhibitions within the museum, including the special family exhibition, The Tolerance Center, the Holocaust Exhibit, an exhibition of artifacts, and the Dicker-Brandeis exhibit. Afternoons were time for reflective art making. Museum docents were the guides for the exhibit explorations and art therapy students led the art making experiences.

The theme of each exhibition was the inspiration for an art experience. For example, on Day 1, participants visited an exhibition illustrating the personal histories of several noted Americans. The exhibition incorporated family members of these famous figures. That afternoon, the teens were given chairs and were asked to consider the chairs as metaphors for their places within their families and communities.

The culminating experience was an art installation using the five art pieces each camper created throughout the week. Participants were given the opportunity to discuss their contributions at an opening reception for friends and family.

The programs outlined here provide a basis for a beginning model of museum-based art therapy. They provided an arena for increased personal expression, increased self-awareness and utilized the art museum and its resources for non-traditional means. Williams (1994) first experimented with a program to assist visitors in expressing personal connections to the art. Other museums have opened their doors to populations with disabling conditions. These museums provided non-traditional populations with various opportunities to visit galleries and to create art in response to selected art objects. Finally, art therapists incorporated museum reproductions, visits, and art objects into treatment plans for clients with serious challenges. In the next section, a pilot project based on these experimental programs will be presented.

The development of the pilot project

The pilot project was a collaboration between the museum educator of a large state university art museum and faculty from the art therapy program. Using the information from past researchers and practitioners, the authors wanted to put these ideas to work and to invite a non-traditional population into the museum.

The museum educator and the primary art therapist engaged in numerous discussions regarding the general goals and objectives of the project prior to its inception, which included the use of art objects to help teens better understand family roles and the feelings associated with being a member of a family group. Both parties found that dialogue about respective roles was vital: the museum educator’s skills included the ability to introduce art objects to the participants, whereas the art therapist’s role was to help the clients engage in discussion about the emotional impact of the selected pieces. The museum educator held knowledge about the exhibits and how to begin engaging small groups in discussing the aesthetics of the art. The art therapist’s contribution included an understanding of the emotional and psychological needs of the clients, possible issues that would arise from being in a different environment, and being prepared for various reactions from the participants. The primary art therapist and the art therapist co-leader spent a few weeks building a relationship with the small group of participants and preparing the group for the field trip. This insured that the participants held some comfort level with the therapists prior to the museum visit. Together the museum educator and two art therapists shaped a theme for the pilot based on the needs of the participants and built a schedule that would be congruent with these needs.
One teacher volunteered her homeroom class for participation in the program. Prior to beginning the project, all students and their respective parents/guardians signed consent forms, including permission to reproduce artwork. Seven students participated in the program (six males and one female), ranging in age from 12 to 14 and functioning on the fifth through seventh grade levels. Four of the students worked on grade level, with the others needing aid with schoolwork. As a group they displayed poor social skills and lacked impulse control. Some of the behavior problems demonstrated in the classroom were manipulation, attention-seeking, inappropriate comments, and argumentativeness. Depression, obsessive-compulsive tendencies, and hyperactivity were just a few of the clinical symptoms exhibited by the students.

Once the school and the students were identified, seven sessions were planned. With input from the teacher, it was determined that the students could make two visits to the museum. To prepare for the museum visits, museum objects were brought to the school. This was done to demonstrate how to interact with art objects.

Examples of student responses

The first art therapy session introduced the theme of the family. The two art therapists began by asking the students to define what family meant to them. Students created a list defining who constituted their family. Some students identified only immediate family members, while others included extended family. One student identified over 30 individuals. Cut shapes were provided for students to make a family collage, with each member identified by a shape. The images provided insight for the art therapists into how each student defined their family.

Further exploration of the family was the goal for the second session. The students were given a set of papers with the name and colored shape of each family member identified in the first session. One of the art therapists discussed the
use of symbolism and asked students to select an image to represent the family members identified in the first session. When discussing their images, several examples of care taking and support were given. One student discussed that his mother was important because he could not open up to anyone else.

The art therapists wanted to prepare students for the first museum visit, so prior to the third session, the art therapists and museum curator of education selected four art pieces to bring to the classroom (images reprinted with permission): two of William Walmsley’s self portraits (see Figs. 1 and 2), Bill Pericola’s *The Silent Woman* (see Fig. 3), and Paul Travis’ *Lumbwa Young Man, Kenya* (see Fig. 4). These art images were chosen because they depicted persons showing strong emotions and because they bore a relationship to previous student discussions of feelings and family members.

The museum curator of education accompanied the art therapists to the school and introduced these works to the students. She explained the artworks and discussed how artists use portraiture to express emotions. After an initial review, students selected one for further exploration. Both art therapists facilitated an exploration of what feeling students felt the images conveyed. Once the art works were discussed, students were asked to complete a portrait of themselves or of someone in their family.

To assist them, the art therapists provided pre-outlined shapes on gray bogus paper. One student drew an image of a person, based on Pericola’s image, which he described as someone who had gone through pain (see Fig. 5). He stated the person in the drawing “feels bad and sad ... this person has not done much with their life ... the scar was from some mistake the person had made.” The teacher discussed this student’s situation with the art therapists, stating that his image appeared to reflect his personal experiences. At the end of this session, the students were informed that they would be visiting the museum the following week.
Fig. 3. *The Silent Woman*, n.d., Bill Pericola.

Fig. 4. *Lumbwa Young Man, Kenya*, 1927, Paul Travis.
The fourth session was held in the museum conference room. Three works were selected by the art therapists and museum curator of education that echoed themes of students’ artwork: Erich Hackel’s *Head of a Young Woman*, Alexander Calder’s *Balloons*, and Ynez Johnson’s *Tribal Coast*. The museum curator of education led the discussion of the art works ending with *Tribal Coast* as a piece about family and community. Students were asked to complete action drawings of two members of their families or communities doing something together. This was done to assess activities that family members may engage in. Due to some of the students’ previous comments about their drawing ability, cutout figures were provided for tracing. The session ended with the introduction of an anonymous work, *Plastic Shirt*. The art therapists explained that this piece would be discussed further when they returned to the museum for a second visit.

To continue working on the theme of the family and the feelings evoked when thinking about the family, students created mono-prints using Plexiglas and watercolor paint for the fifth session. This activity was chosen to allow the students to create abstract work regarding a very affect-laden theme. One student discussed that in his prints, each color represented a different expression; red was between happy and sad, pink was on the verge of being mad, brown was mad, green was not wanting to be bothered, and blue was enjoyment.

Prior to the final museum visit, the art therapists and the museum curator of education carefully selected art objects that reflected family or relationship issues. The museum exhibit at the time was the BFA/MFA Graduating Artists Exhibition, 2004. Using Ray Williams (1994) approach, students were asked to study the objects and then select one that they felt connected to and discuss their choice with the group. Items selected included large ceramic figures: a

Fig. 5. Student portrait.
father and child and a woman (see Figs. 6 and 7). These figures appeared to relate most to the theme of family and were the two largest. All but one student identified father and child for discussion.

One interpreted that the child was reaching for the stars, identified as goals, but the man was mischievous. He stated he was uncertain what the man was doing. Another student saw the interaction as happy, stating the man was helping the child and observing that both were smiling. Still another student added that he felt the father was doing something important. Another student offered a very different interpretation. He explained he liked the hard work and detail, expressing that if he had done this work, the cracks would have made him upset.

Then the students were led to an area where they could sit and again view four artworks from the permanent collection: Art Werger’s Pursued by Conscience, William Walmsley’s Study of Gloria, an anonymous piece titled Plaster Relief, and David Bungay’s Wright and Walmsley. The students were asked what they felt the art was about. Again several students interpreted the work by identifying the feeling they conveyed. Most students were drawn to Pursued by Conscience. Two felt one man was running away from another and felt scared and angry while two others felt the second image was a shadow of the man who was running from his past. One discussed Study of Gloria stating that she liked the colors and another identified that it looked like the lady had lost someone and was feeling lonely and sad.

Finally, Plastic Shirt was displayed and the students were asked to think about a shirt—like a sports shirt with logos—that would represent each’s family. They were given cutouts of both the front and back of a shirt. Once each side was decorated, they stapled the pieces together and stuffed the shirts with newspaper. One student offered an explanation of his work stating that he had made the Italian flag since his family was Italian and his grandmother had raised him (see Fig. 8). On the front of his shirt were patches of color with a large spiral over top. He discussed that each color was a different member of his family.

During the final session, students reviewed their works with the art therapists and each student was asked to select three or four pieces for the exhibition. The students were paired to discuss their works as a means to incorporate social
Fig. 7. Museum Art: BFA/MFA Graduating Artists Exhibition, 2004.

Fig. 8. Student T-shirt.
skills into the experience. One student, who had explored Walmsley’s work in session three, drew a portrait without a mouth (see Fig. 9). This student selected his portrait saying that it looked like him when he was little. Once he selected this piece, he asked for a pencil to draw a mouth. After adding the mouth, he returned the drawing to the art therapists stating it was now finished and ready for exhibition (see Fig. 10).

Summary of the project

The art therapists approached this pilot project without knowing what to expect. Based on the student population, there was an element of apprehension about student response to the art therapists themselves and the art activities presented. Steps were taken to gain an understanding of the school and their system of behavior modification. Background information on each student was collected prior to beginning the project. The classroom teacher and support staff were extremely supportive and invested in the students’ participation in the pilot program.

The reactions of the students to this project surprised not only the art therapists and museum curator of education, but also the teacher and other support staff at the school. After the first session with the students, the teacher particularly noted the active involvement in the art exhibited by one student. This behavior was unusual for her. Each session offered unexpected student reactions such as lack of resistance or negative behaviors, eagerness of students to engage and talk about their work, and sensitive associations made by students between the art objects, their own artworks, and their personal lives.
The school’s art teacher commented she had noticed changes in this class. Students who were typically uncomfortable working with art projects seemed more adventurous and less restricted in their work. She also noted that students would talk about their other art projects with her. The scope of this program appeared to reach beyond the sessions held weekly.

Conclusions

This pilot program was undertaken to assess museum function as a therapeutic tool. As Linesch stated in her 2004 article, “meeting with museum personnel began the long process of articulating and planning art therapy experiences adjacent to the exhibit” (p. 3). In Linesch’s statement are two keys for successful program development. First, preplanning is important and second, collaborative efforts with museum educators or liaisons are imperative.

The university pilot project began with discussions with the museum educator about having art therapists use the museum as one tool in treatment. An agreement was reached that non-traditional populations should be provided more access to the university art museum. This agreement led to a 4-year program plan. The pilot project described here was implemented in year 2. Identifying a student group and a complementary theme was one of the initial tasks. Once the school, teacher, and students agreed to be part of the pilot, specific art experiences were identified based on the theme, the needs of the students, and the art objects available for use. Based on the success of the pilot, community art therapists were invited to use the museum as a tool in treatment. The museum educator and both of the art therapists involved in the pilot will serve as consultants for community art therapists.
Based on the success of the pilot project, art therapists may want to begin with a limited collaborative project. Arranging for the museum educator to visit the therapy setting may also be useful in planning. Initially, use of a few museum objects to begin the program may provide clues as to future interventions. Since the use of museums in art therapy is in an experimental stage, it is important to be creative and inventive. The components outlined here provide an initial framework, but should only be seen as an experimental model. Any model must meet the unique needs of the clients. It is important to continue this work as the art museum might provide alternative opportunities to serve our clients.

References