



The therapeutic framework in art therapy: Exploring ritual as repetition and flexibility as adaptation

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This presentation explores the therapeutic frame in art therapy as both a repeated structure and a space of return. Based on qualitative data from questionnaires, the research investigates how art therapists define and adjust the frame, highlighting essential components, its variability across contexts and clienteles, and the influence of therapists' orientation, beliefs, and professional experience. Beyond clinical implications, the project contributes to the academic training of future art therapists by clarifying a foundational concept for practice. Conducted within a Canadian university art therapy program, this research informs training by identifying competences essential for maintaining effective and ethical frameworks, while opening dialogue internationally and interculturality.

From Bordin's (1979) model of the working alliance, the art therapy framework extends to include the mediating role of the artwork (Schaverien, 2021), with client engagement in materials strengthening the alliance (Gazit *et al.*, 2021). Repetition is embedded in the frame. The regularity of time, space, and rules creates a ritualised container that secures the process. Yet repetition is not static, it allows transformation through resonance (Rosa, 2023) and mutuality (Ball, 2002). Return is equally central, the frame offers a reliable home where challenges reappear, offering opportunities for repair (Eubanks, Muran & Safran, 2018).

Flexibility emerges as a crucial dimension of effectiveness, balancing stability with adaptation (Landbeck & Laurent, 2022), achieved through responsive adjustment (Owen & Hilsenroth, 2014), transdisciplinary openness (Bucciarelli, 2016), and divergent, holistic thinking that resists a purely Western mode (Timm-Bottos, 2016). Such flexibility also reflects Rehnman's (2025) view of the good psychotherapist, defined less by fixed traits than ethical attunement. As Toll, Beniston, and Kanerahtenhá (2025) remind us, what constitutes a secure and meaningful frame is culturally situated, varying across traditions, values, and communities.

This presentation will discuss results from the study, reflect on the therapeutic frame as a



dynamic site of repetition and return, and consider its implications for professional practice, training, and the identity of art therapists.

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Biography

Andréa Bédard-Gascon, M.A., ATPQ, is a professor and program's co-director in the Art Therapy Department at the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT). Grounded in a community-based approach, her research explores the effectiveness of art therapy through qualitative and arts-based methods, with a focus on aging, identity, and group processes. Her work is rooted in a socially engaged approach that highlights accessibility and the integration of theory and practice to support vulnerable populations.

Recent conference presentations

Bédard-Gascon, A., Riccardi, M., McLaughlin, H. and Gingras, G. (2025, September).

Ecosystemic Perspectives in Art Therapy: Land, Identity, Relational Processes, and Material Dialogues. Panel presented at the 46th CATA-ACAT Conference *Dreaming us Forward: Co-creating Belonging through the Healing Arts*, Winnipeg, Canada.

Riccardi, M. et Bédard-Gascon, A. (2025, May). **Group intervention program focused on creativity in a school setting: depicting the journey of first-generation immigrant teenagers (Programme d'intervention de groupe axé sur la création dans un contexte scolaire: mettre en images le parcours de la première génération adolescente immigrante.)**. Paper presented at the conference *Art-based interventions to support the positive development of vulnerable youth in school settings* as part of the 92nd Acfas Congress, Montreal, QC, Canada.



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Bédard-Gascon, A. (2025, April). **Between resilience and vulnerability: reconciling the roles of woman and university professor – A heuristic research-creation project on my identity journey (Entre résilience et vulnérabilité: conciliation des rôles de femme et de professeure à l'université – Une recherche-crédation heuristique sur mon parcours identitaire.)** Paper presented at the 92nd *Acfas Congress*, Montreal, QC, Canada.