The Interface of Cognitive and Sensuous Ways of Knowing for Art Therapists

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This forum will initiate a dialogue regarding the interface of sensory and cognitive forms of knowledge. Each participant will give a brief operational definition of the following questions for the purposes of later discussion. They are: What do we mean by sensory forms of knowing? Is this experience different from a cognitive way of knowing? Can both forms of knowing be part of one art therapeutic experience? This panel will then explore the responses by offering examples from their clinical therapeutic experience. We will then proceed to apply some of these notions to the theory of treatment process. Such questions will be raised as: Is there a specific aspect of treatment that demands verbal and cognitive processing? Do certain defenses need verbal confrontation in order for conflict material to be assimilated and integrated? Are there specific phases of treatment where sensory forms of knowing apply more specifically to the experience of the self? (i.e. narcissistic disorders) On the other hand, in order to know the "other" do we call upon other processes such as linear reasoning and logical ordering to apprehend the "other"? (i.e. splitting in borderline conditions) The implications of these questions will inevitably lead to broader theoretical problems such as: Do we know what we know without verbal processing? By contrast, can words hide rather than clarify what we know? Is an integration of the verbal and nonverbal world necessary when we believe in a perceptual, sensory, cognitive wholeness of the personality?

Issues relevant to this discussion will relate to self and other differentiation, boundary formation and the whole area of meaning. Can we develop meaning without checking out one's perceptions with the outside world? Do values and ideals need clarification and ordering that can best be approached through a combined synthesis of sensory, cognitive and verbal dialogues? There is no inherent conflict between therapeutic process and a reflective cognitive understanding of one's life history and present day functioning. However, the sensitive integration of pauses for cognitive reflection and here and now processing need clarification and amplification. Implications regarding the theory and technique of art therapy will be drawn from this discussion.