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## **A Surface Design Intervention for adult inmates infected and affected with HIV/Aids**

### **Abstract**

*This research paper focuses on an educational Surface Design Intervention (SDI) for inmates. It covers the present day situation, from 2006 to 2007, in a Western Cape correctional facility, regarding the needs of a selected group of inmates. This group of 20 inmates consists of 10 HIV/Aids positive and 10 HIV/Aids negative participants. The research paper argues that there is potential to plan, design and implement an educational SDI, in a group work situation, with these HIV/Aids infected and affected prison inmates. This is done in order to establish the SDI as a skills development programme and a therapeutic intervention and income generating resource. In addition, this research study aims to understand and interpret how the various inmate participants, in a social setting, construct the world around them and what effect and impact the SDI has on them.*

*This intervention is facilitated by two qualified art therapists and involves the use of different art materials through which the prison inmates express and explore their thoughts, feelings and concerns in a safe, contained and supportive space. The health and wellness literature provided the conceptual scaffolding to frame the SDI against. The literature indicated that a holistic approach to rehabilitation and instruction is vital to help inmates function optimally in daily life.*

*Ultimately the SDI process focuses on its value regarding identity formation, emotional expression, and ethical development. The research paper concludes that oppositional discourses present in the lives of these prisoners can, and indeed should be reconciled in order for them to achieve a positive affirmation of their status. These polarities, once bridged, offer a moderating influence on these prisoners' lives, which contribute to their wellbeing and success both inside and potentially outside of prison.*

**Key Words:** affected, art therapy, behaviour, infected, skills, Surface Design Intervention

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### **Introduction**

This research study addresses the significance and impact of an educational Surface Design Intervention (SDI) on inmates who are infected and affected with HIV/Aids. General inmate concerns are exacerbated by this illness, and inmates infected with HIV/Aids face daily challenges as they deal with the impact of the virus on their lives. Prisoners who are affected by the virus (but not infected), also face daily difficulties as they are exposed to a variety of challenges including the risk of infection. In addition, these challenges include economic, emotional, ethical and personal ones, as both infected and affected groups are faced with the far-reaching effects of this illness in the Malmesbury Correctional services (MCS).

The planning, design, and implementation of this SDI was primarily conceptualised as a therapeutic intervention, while facilitating inmates' acquisition of new art, design and craft skills. Two qualified art facilitator therapists coached the inmates in the use of different art materials, to enable them to explore and express their thoughts and feelings while emphasising the value of the experimental process. A safe, contained and supportive space was established for these inmates in which they could work through their issues and concerns, for some the first opportunity to engage in this type of activity. The research study details the development, implementation and impact of the SDI on the selected group of prisoners.

## **Research design**

One overarching aim guided the research study: To develop, implement and assess the impact of a SDI which is designed as an educational and therapeutic programme for a selected group of prisoners in the (MCS).

As a Surface Designer and researcher it is with these HIV/Aids infected and affected inmates in mind that I felt a need to engage with this challenge from both the educational and creative points of view. I had to engage with a new field of study art therapy, to enhance my existing knowledge about therapeutic applications of art and design.

Although there is much yet to be learnt about the effects of art programmes and the programme elements that will constitute the outcomes, this research study created a platform, through the use of art therapy, where various race groups can work together and meet a variety of challenges as inmates infected and affected with HIV/Aids. Another reason for the conceptualisation of the study was to assess impact and inmates behavioural change on who participated in the SDI. The development of social life skills to form a supportive framework for these inmates illustrate that art therapy interventions can lead to positive changes in prison and outside of prison once prisoners are released, and this was another motivating factor in this study.

It was hoped that the research process would positively influence the mindsets of the participants about their health and their HIV/Aids status through participation in the interactive, educational SDI. It is possible for this programme to become a pilot study, which, when offered at other correctional facilities, may offer opportunities and improve the self-esteem and economic circumstances of the participants. This in turn can contribute towards these adults maintaining a healthier lifestyle through the process of healing and skills acquisition that participation in this specific art, craft and design intervention offers.

Qualitative research methods were chosen in order to gain an understanding of the personal and social 'worlds' of the adults infected and affected with HIV/Aids in the (MCS). The main method of data collection was observation which included video-taping each session. This was done in order to gauge how the participants developed in their art skills and if their emotions about their HIV/Aids status became more positive. All the artwork that the participants finished was photographed to show the improvement in their art skills and the quality of the artwork. Interviews with the participants which were also tape-recorded and questionnaires were all methods of data collection. Interview data were gained from individual interviews and focus group interviews to gain insight into programmes in prison and what their connotation was about the new skills that they had learnt in this SDI. Narrative, open-ended interviews were also conducted with some of the participants to facilitate an easy response. No predetermined questions were asked, in order to remain as open and adaptable as possible to the interviewee's nature and priorities. During the interview situation the respondent felt calmer and more prepared to respond in their own environment (McNamara, 1999:1).

## **The research setting**

Prisoners in South Africa face problems of overcrowding, violence and poor nutrition. Added to this burden in recent times is the increased threat from HIV/Aids. The HIV/Aids epidemic has been relatively late in coming to South Africa but infection rates are now 20 percent in the adult population (Goyer & Gow, 2002:8).

Most people who end up in prison are from marginalised communities with limited access to health, education, and/or other sources of social welfare (Goyer, 2003:1). There is an urgent need for the teaching profession, parents, organisations, places of employment and communities to become involved with educational programmes as well as to promote business opportunities and income generating activities within affected communities. Specific educational programmes will enable prison inmates to educate themselves to cope better with the consequences of this widespread disease (Neethling, 1993).

The support structures for this research study existed, from the HIV/Aids Unit, Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) because of previous involvement since 2004, with the Group of Hope (GOH) as part of the HIV/Aids unit's community outreach programme. The (GOH) was this

research projects focus group and target site, and is a project in the (MCS), which focuses on HIV/Aids and on job creation for people living with HIV/Aids in prison.

### Selection of the participants

The main focus of this research was the development, implementation and evaluation of an educational SDI for prison inmates infected and affected with HIV/Aids. An existing group of inmates named the 'Group of Hope' nominated a focus group of ten infected and ten affected participants, this proposed SDI could however only accommodate 20 participants. The duration of the intervention was from 15 May to 22 June 2006, comprising 12 sessions twice a week for three hours. Members of the (GOH) and wardens selected the 20 inmate participants as all 35 who were willing to participate in this SDI. The criteria for the SDI were that 10 of the participants had to be infected and 10 affected by HIV/Aids. In addition these participants would be willing to disclose their HIV/Aids status. The reason why this research study focused on 10 participants infected and 10 affected by HIV/Aids was to establish whether the SDI is beneficial to these participants in expressing their feelings through art, learning new skills and if there were any positive changes in their behaviour, levels of aggression and emotions as a result of the SDI. The qualitative research methods helped me to understand the participants' point of view and the social and cultural context within which they operated.

*The group was selected because:*

- This was an existing group called the 'Group of Hope' that was formed before the study, and they were comfortable in interacting in this group.
- Approval was obtained from the Malmesbury Correctional Services and the 'Group of Hope', as well as a written consent from all the participants.
- These 'Group of Hope' participants were willing to participate in the programme, and also committed to participate for the duration of the programme.
- Support structures existed, from the HIV/Aids Unit, Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) because of previous involvement since 2004, with the Group of Hope as part of the HIV/Aids unit's community outreach programme.
- The events selected for detailed observation were events in which the respondents could talk about their HIV/Aids status, their artwork and their emotions.

Furthermore, the reason why mainly qualitative research methods are chosen, is because a qualitative approach investigates the behaviour, feelings, emotions, beliefs and personal views of informants and participants during fieldwork research (Ertmer, Leedy & Newby, 1997:106). There was a need to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting constructed the world around them. Qualitative research involves the use of observation and participant observation during field work. Also, interviews and questionnaires, documents and texts, and the researcher's impressions and reactions are utilised in qualitative research.

	HIV/Aids infected participants	HIV/Aids affected participants	Participants who did not feel comfortable in revealing their status publicly or did not undergo an HIV/Aids test
<b>Participants</b>	6	6	8
<b>Cultural group</b>	4 Black 2 Coloured	2 Black 3 Coloured 1 White	7 Black 1 Coloured
<b>Ages</b>	25 – 48	25 – 48	25 – 48
<b>Facilitator therapist</b>	Macauley Nel Raath	Macauley Nel Raath	Macauley Nel Raath
<b>Duration</b>	Twice a week for 6 weeks 15May – 22 June 2006	Twice a week for 6 weeks 15May – 22 June 2006	Twice a week for 6 weeks 15May – 22 June 2006

	HIV/Aids infected participants	HIV/Aids affected participants	Participants who did not feel comfortable in revealing their status publicly or did not undergo an HIV/Aids test
<b>Outcomes</b>	Clay Sculptures Chalk pastel drawings Water-colour painting Poetry Charcoal drawings Black Indian ink sketches Tile mural	Clay Sculptures Chalk pastel drawings Water-colour painting Poetry Charcoal drawings Black Indian ink sketches Tile mural	Clay Sculptures Chalk pastel drawings Water-colour painting Poetry Charcoal drawings Black Indian ink sketches Tile mural

**Table 1: Participants' demographic affiliations**

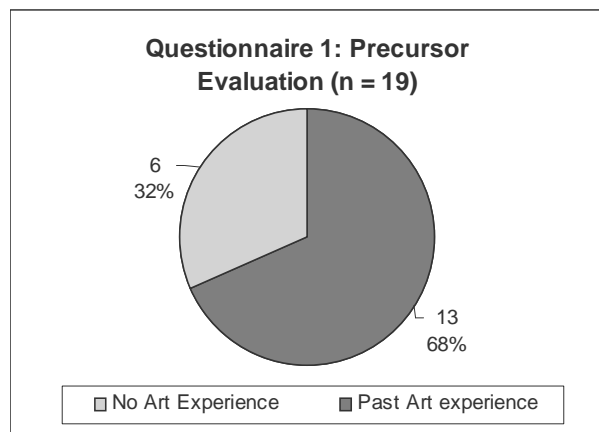
### Presentation of the research findings

Questionnaires were administered to the participants throughout the six-week intervention, and therefore features that were perceived to make the SDI successful, were from their perspectives. The questionnaires were also answered anonymously and one week was allowed for completion. The questionnaires were given to the prisoners, and were concerned with the benefits that they attained during this SDI. This was a valuable method of data collection for this research study, because it was a quick and straightforward method to get sufficient information from the participants in a non-threatening way. It was also uncomplicated to compare the questionnaires, as this was used for comparison and analysis purposes

### Data collected at the beginning of the intervention

The first questionnaire elicited prisoners' responses regarding expectations of the potential benefits of the SDI. They had to indicate, for instance the level of past art experience that they had possessed, and whether they thought that the SDI would provide them with the necessary skills to make their way in the outside world, once released from prison.

Sixty Eight percent of the respondents indicated that they had used art materials before. For the other inmates it was their first time, as illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Sixty eight percent of the prisoners had past art experience**

Sixty three percent of the participants (Figure 2) indicated that they had tried to make or had made creative artefacts before.

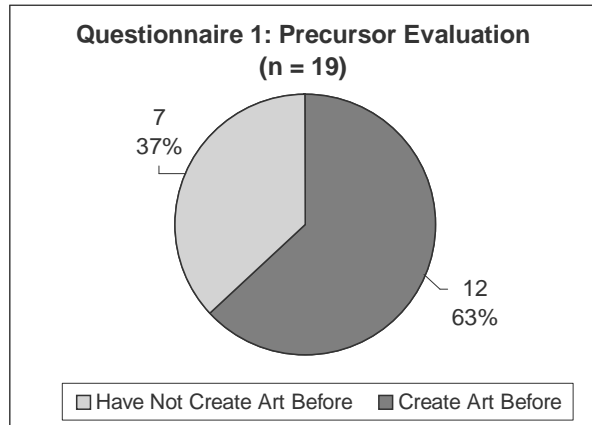


Figure 2: Sixty three percent created art before

Only 16 percent of the 63 percent who had made art objects previously, had tried to sell any of the articles they had made, as illustrated in Figure 3. The participants indicated in the questionnaire that they did not have the confidence to sell their artwork before

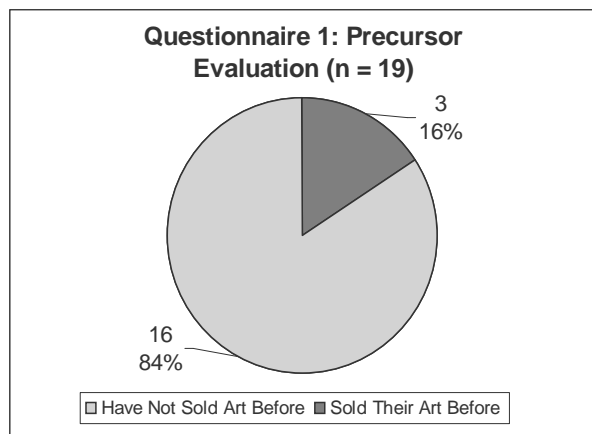


Figure 3: Sixteen percent sold art before

### Post-intervention data collection

For the final questionnaire there were only 16 respondents, and 44 percent of the participants stated that it was difficult for them to express their feelings through art, as illustrated in Figure 4. While the majority of the respondents, 94 percent, indicated that they felt that they had improved their art skills, while all of the respondents stated that they would like to continue with the SDI to learn more art, craft and design skills. The participants explained that the SDI had empowered them and they would like to learn more about other techniques and skills like painting on glass, and that they would like this to be an ongoing process. At the last two sessions the participants indicated that they felt more at ease in expressing their feelings through art and this was an incredible skill for them to learn. Two participants responded in the following way about learning more art skills 'it will help me to rediscover some of the things [previous art skills] I have forgotten, it will also empower me with the necessary skills for dealing with different situations'. One participant thinks 'this type of training should be ongoing and should also be facilitated to other prisons to empower more inmates'.

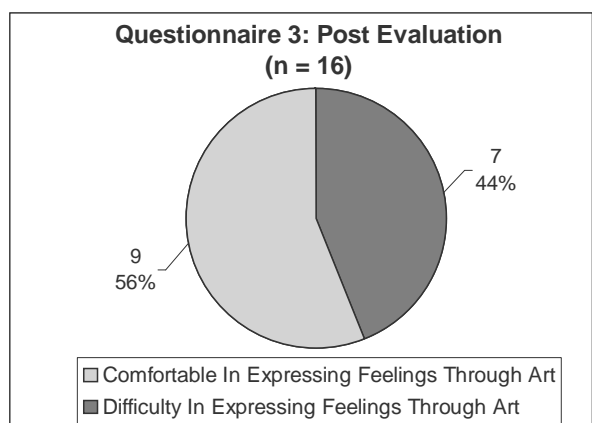
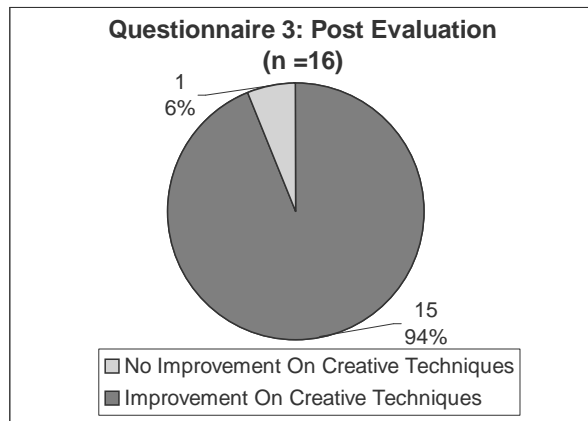


Figure 4: Difficulty expressing feelings through art

Ninety four percent of the participants felt they had improved their creative techniques in the various art media that they were working with, and will be able to use these art, craft and designing skills in the future to teach others and create a hobby or a small income for themselves.



**Figure 5: Ninety four percent of the inmates felt that they have improved in the art mediums**

### **Research findings: observations and post-observations of the SDI**

The 12 sessions of the SDI, including the media used, and the processes followed, are outlined in detail in the following sections.

#### **Learning to listen: responding through clay**

The media of clay illustrated how to concentrate, and how to focus on one specific thing by expressing feelings while making a sculpture out of clay. While the participants explained their artwork and listened to each other, life skills were enhanced. This process taught them how to listen and respond to each other and the group. By explaining their artwork within the group for the first time, illustrated to all participants that their opinion also counts, and it is valued for what it contributes to the group.

Clay has a very soft texture, and helped participants to focus on the texture and the form that was being created, to take feelings that might be cropped up inside of them and form it into the clay. In addition, the plastic and responsive quality of the medium gives them the ability to work through and with their feelings and frustrations. These results form an enormous amount of stress they experience in the prison atmosphere and the guilt and stress associated with their previous crimes they committed. An exception occurred when some respondents identified the specific skills that they learnt in the first session, by exploring the texture of clay. These skills provided stability for them in prison, such as: learning meditation techniques, working together as a group and communication within the group.

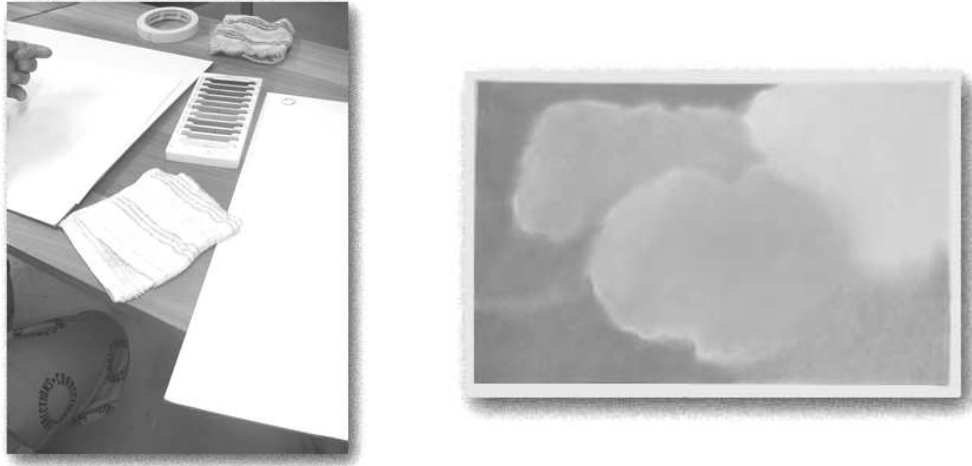


**Figure 6: Working with clay (Kibi) 'Protea ornament'**

### **Warming to the media of chalk pastels**

The introduction to colour with chalk pastels outlined what happens when two or more colours are mixed, that a third colour is formed or that tints and tones may be achieved when adding white or black. Each person responded differently to the mixing of colours; some were very pleased while others were more emotional, and some were even very scared of mixing and overlapping the colours.

A couple of the participants started in the four corners, as a child would do, and many of them still kept the boundaries between areas intact through not blending the colours, illustrated in Figure 7.



**Figure 7: Introduction to chalk pastels (D') kaleidoscope'**

During the second session after the chalk pastel exercise, one participant felt 'free' while participating in this chalk pastel exercise, and felt that he can now improve on the skill learnt, one participant explained:

This was my first time working with colour pastels, and I would like to improve on this skill as I can see now I can do better, in expressing my feelings (Spier Wit, 2006).

### **Claming colour quietly with watercolour painting**

In the process of working with paint, the participants learnt about colour theory. They were taught about primary and complementary colours and how to mix them by observing what happens when they are mixed. During the painting exercise the participants thoroughly explored the gesture, feeling and colour atmosphere of their own pictures.

Participants found working in colour rather overwhelming, as this painting exercise was an unending enjoyment and exploration for them. Observing what happens when the three primary colours are mixed and flow into each other onto their artwork.

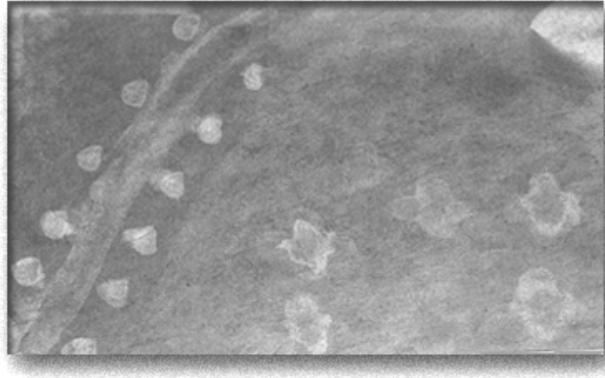


**Figure 8: becoming aware of colours**



### The future unfolding in charcoal

Charcoal was a very soft medium for the participants to work with and was also a very easy media to use and understand. By participating in the charcoal exercise inmates had to cover the entire page in black charcoal, and by using their putty rubber they had to lift the charcoal and let the light escape that came through the darkened page, as illustrated in Figure 9, the final outcome of the charcoal exercise.



**Figure 9: the future unfolding in charcoal  
(Milky) 'Light'**

Warren describes the significance of charcoal in the following way: Charcoal can also add new dimensions when an art eraser is employed to lift areas of black away. The 'positive space' image or design can be created through working into a large black space. Positive space is the actual design area; negative space is the artistic term used for the space around the initial or essential design. For some people the media of charcoal can be particularly gratifying, for they are creating an element of 'magic' (Warren, 1993:38). This element of 'magic' is empowering since it implies control over the media.

### The gift of hope in ink

During the art activity, they had to gesture their name in the air with eyes closed, using either both hands or one. These bodily movements increased relaxation that helps the participants to transfer these exaggerated strokes onto the paper (Crone & Oster, 2004:12). This gesture could be modified as they wished until they formed a sign which they felt honoured them, then they had to paint this sign on paper as a signature with Indian ink. Each artwork was then passed around in the group, and each participant had the chance to put some colour on this page and write on an attached piece of paper a 'gift' to acknowledge a quality, which they admired or observed in the person. The reason for this exercise was that the participants could acknowledge each person's good qualities, learning from them and noticing that there is something good in everybody.

Illustrated in Figure ten, the composition of 'Peaches' line work was done with confidence and the composition is very strong and worked together with all the line elements and semicircular movement with no unsteady lines. Through this exercise 'Peaches' could truly express his feelings towards the group through the use of the bright colours and tactile interaction with the chalk pastel materials. The colours used, flowed into each other in a soft overflow and integrated way. Working together on each other's artwork linked the participants together, giving them a sense of ownership and belonging.



**Black Indian ink exercise**



**Gift with pastels**

**Figure 10: Gesture of name and gifts (Peaches)**

### Projecting positive messages

The focus for the last art project was to create a tile mural for the prison. Each participant had the freedom to paint a positive message on four tiles they each received. It had to be something they had learnt or encountered while in prison, something constructive about HIV/Aids and had to convey a positive message for people to learn from, or something that makes them happy about their life outside prison. These could be childhood memories, family, their previous work situation or careers. The project was structured around projecting these positive messages onto tiles, as illustrated in Figure 11.

When the inmates finished their four tiles, there was a sense of pride of achievement that was enhanced by the positive comments from the wardens and the visitors from the CPUT. Emotionally the tile project helped the inmates to paint elements on the tiles that made them happy and took them back to happier days. The tile project brought the group together as a more closely knit atmosphere was formed, and for some of them the tile project helped and supported them to give a message to people about the dangers that HIV/Aids hold.

McCarty and Testa explained that an art therapy group devoted to mural making provides a safe and supportive group environment for resolving conflicts and gradually transforming the psychological effects of trauma. By creating the tile mural empowered the inmates to tolerate the presence of traumatic memories that they might have. The tile mural itself also gave the participants a voice and a means for self-expression that allowed others to respond to their ideas. They were able to communicate a powerful message of hope and remembrance for themselves and for viewers while rebuilding shattered trust in their future and in the world (McCarthy & Testa, 2004:4).

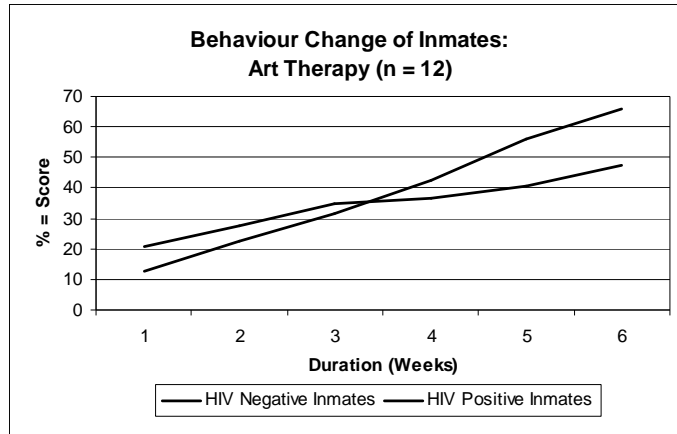


**Figure 11: Group tile mural for prison's boardroom and visitors' area**

The tile murals were unveiled on the World Aids Day event for the 'Group of Hope' at the prison as illustrated in Figure 11. The function commemorated the World Aids Day; the focus was not only to highlight the HIV/Aids campaign, but also to acknowledge the efforts of the prisoners who had made meaningful and successful contributions in the prevention, control and management of HIV/Aids.

### The benefits which emerged during the Surface Design Intervention

Twelve out of the twenty participants were willing to disclose their HIV/Aids status during the SDI. Four participants did not want to disclose their HIV/Aids status and the other four have not been for an HIV/Aids test. Measurements were drawn on six HIV-positive and six HIV-negative participants using an observational schedule during each session to reflect any positive or negative changes in the participants' behaviour, feelings and attitudes. The changes were evaluated according to percentages determining the increase or decrease in these different levels.



HIV Status	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
HIV Negative	12.5	22.5	31.7	42.5	55.8	47.5
HIV Positive	20.8	27.5	35.0	36.7	40.8	47.5

**Figure 12: Measuring the different improvement levels of the participants' behaviour in general**

The behaviour levels were measured according to each participant's behaviour throughout each session. This was to determine if there were any changes in their performance towards the group or by working with the different art media in each session. The participants all started off with a low percentage in the first week and went up to 20 percent in the second week and to 47.5 percent in the last session. The participants behaviour before and during towards each session was very positive, as they were always eager to learn and took each challenge in the artwork as a new learning curve.

## Conclusion

The data revealed that oppositional discourses were present in the lives of the infected and affected inmates which could, can, and indeed *should* be reconciled in order to empower them, both inside prison and once released from prison. This empowerment manifested in the development of specific social life skills such as improved intercultural communication, improved ethical development, improved personal attitudes and improved artistic skills levels. This social life skills component of the SDI displayed far-reaching effects insofar as it had a positive influence on the prisoners as holistic beings, since it addressed their needs on the physical, intellectual, emotional, ethical and socio-economic levels. It was this very aspect which illustrated the strength of this research study, and that is the fact that opposites can be used in a holistic way to bring about powerful change in individuals. Statistics have illustrated that the incidence of HIV/Aids in South African prisons is currently peaking at 42 percent out of a total prison population of 158,000 inmates in 240 facilities (Goyer, 2003:4).

The literature indicated that one of the biggest challenges faced by inmates is the gap between their existing levels of education and the job market needs, which have to be bridged if prisoners were to be independent and successful when released. The reason for this is that the majority of inmates originate from marginalised communities with limited access to education, and health resources, (especially those who are HIV/Aids positive in South Africa) and to other sources of social welfare. In addition the literature underscored the fact that art therapy interventions in prison settings can develop the capacity for spontaneous art expression in order to help participants express their anxieties and emotions as freely as possible. After having expressed their emotions, the process of sharing and caring within a group setting can then be activated. Art therapy as a developmental process (and also to a degree a remedial one) was found to be related to cognitive behavioural models in psychology, because of its emphasis on an understanding of human development and behaviour throughout an individuals' lifecycle.

The post-intervention data revealed what the participants had learnt in terms of creative and life skills, when most of them confirmed that they would take these newly acquired skills back to their communities and in doing so help community members to access new skills. The value of the SDI

was identified in terms of its ability to promote healthy judgement. Data indicated that the SDI helped the participants understand the difference between right and wrong, through engagement with the various exercises and art activities. Participants were able to identify and express their feelings through art and thus deal with them, and they even felt they could assist others to do art and in turn help them deal with *their* emotions. Prisoners were fascinated by the SDI process and felt that a continuation of this programme would form a foundation for the processes of painting, moulding and sculpting clay, as well as abstract pastel drawing, charcoal drawing and tile painting. The potential economic benefit of the SDI was illustrated in a limited way since some of the participants had already started selling their art and craft items produced during the SDI, after the programme's completion.

The artefacts produced in the SDI were critiqued in terms of their aesthetic quality although this was not the original intention. The processes followed in the SDI were evaluated in terms of changes to the inmates' behaviour, feelings and attitudes and its value was ultimately illustrated in the way in which the participants grasped the vocational and philosophical purposes of the SDI. These purposes were expressed by the participants as a twofold one; an acquisition of artistic and technical skills as well as the acquisition of life skills.

One of the most significant findings with regard to the participant inmates is the fact that the SDI helped these participants to cope with the challenges that HIV/Aids bring. Working with and through their emotions, using creativity as a vehicle for self-expression, in a safe and supportive space, enabled them to cope in a more positive way with their current situation and status. The improvement in their artistic skills levels, which was clearly reflected in the mastery of the different art media (chalk pastel, charcoal, watercolour painting, clay, black Indian ink, and painting on tiles), was accompanied by an improvement in their state of mind. In sharing and listening to each other with respect, they were able to overcome some of their interpersonal and personal challenges and difficulties, which resulted in changes in their behaviour and attitudes.

The study illustrated that a programme specifically developed for and implemented in a specific correctional facility (Malmesbury), provided the inmates with invaluable support. The participants learnt coping skills and positive behavioural changes were supported through emotional release and the cultivation of insight. Improved interpersonal skills were experienced while maintaining self-awareness, reality orientation and strengthening of resilience. The value of this SDI lies in the fact that it cannot be underestimated as a tool that holds much potential for improving the general conditions in other correctional facilities countrywide. In the words of one participant who believed that the SDI would even prevent him from committing crime again once released from prison: 'It *will* sustain me when I am out of this place or released'. For me, as the researcher, this study represents a sign of hope in the future of South African prisons and inmates; that through art and education positive and powerful changes can be brought about in human beings.

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Cape Peninsula University of Technology

2004 B Tech – Textile Design & Technology (cum laude)  
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### Achievements

2002: Prize – Continental China – coffee mug designs competition  
2002: First prize – St Mary's Cathedral Vestment competition  
2002: One of 13 finalists – Southern Sun & Ulster Carpets design competition  
2003: Third prize – Mr Price Home and House & Leisure Fresh New Talent competition  
2003: Third prize – Young Textile Designer Awards 2003 – Da Gama Textiles Ltd  
2003: Merit Prize – Young Textile Designer Awards 2003 – Da Gama Textiles Ltd  
2004: Finalist – Philani Weavers – Community Project  
2005: Finalist – Design Achievers Award  
2006: Project – Bridging Polarities in Art at Malmesbury Correctional Services

### Hobbies:

Dancing, Painting, Crafts, Reading and traveling