

Report on the 1st International Symposium of Creative Arts Education and Therapy

第一届国际创造性艺术教育和治疗研讨会报告

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Abstract

The first International Symposium of Creative Arts Education and Therapy (ISCAET) took place in Beijing, on the 6th to 8th of May, 2016. This event was presented by the Inspirees Institute and the Creative Arts Education and Therapy – Eastern and Western Perspectives (CAET) journal, and hosted by the Beijing Normal University in partnership with the School of Art and Communication and the Dance Department. Additional organisers were the Association of Creative Movement in Italy, the Music Therapy Center and the Central Conservatory of Music in China as well as the Wuxi Mental Health Hospital and the China Open University.

Approximately 150 professionals from diverse cultural, social, educational and language backgrounds participated in the symposium to share and disseminate their expertise in the arts, education and therapy. Participants were dance, drama, music and play therapists, teachers, researchers and practitioners whose target was to further stimulate and develop this scientific field. A combination of long and short presentations, posters and workshops provided a better understanding of the knowledge stemming from continents around the world – America, Europe, Asia and Australia – in an attempt to bridge West and East.

In the present report, a description will be given regarding the context of the symposium, various educational and therapeutic approaches and the people to whom they can be applied, as well as challenges and recommendations to be considered for future projects.

摘要

第一届国际创造性艺术教育和治疗研讨会（ISCAET）于2016年5月6日至8日在北京举行。本届研讨会由亿派学院和《创造性艺术教育和治疗-东西方视角》（CAET）期刊与北京师范大学艺术与传媒学院舞蹈系合作举办。其他协办组织机构包括意大利创意舞动协会、中央音乐学院/中国音乐治疗中心、无锡精神卫生中心和中国国家开放大学。

来自不同文化、社会、教育、语言背景的大约150名专业人士参加了这次研讨会，分享和传播他们在艺术教育和治疗的专业知识。与会者包括舞蹈、戏剧、音乐和游戏的治疗师、教师、研究人员和从业人员，其目标是进一步促进和发展这一学科领域。长短结合的演讲、海报和工作坊等形式的组合提供了更好地了解来自世界各大洲 - 美洲、欧洲、亚洲和澳洲的知识，并架起沟通东西方的桥梁。

本报告在研讨会的背景下，对不同的教育和治疗方法、适用的人群，以及未来的工作和项目需考虑的挑战和建议进行了描述。

1. From Arts to Arts Therapy

As professionals from different scientific fields presented their work, attendants had the chance to critically think about a wide range of issues. One of the most broadly-discussed was the differences among arts, education and therapy. When it comes to art-based approaches, are there boundaries or specific criteria to define whether there are educational, therapeutic or personal purposes and benefits behind them? When do arts start to gain therapeutic value? What's the dividing line?

Marcia Plevin, in her presentation "Dance to Dance Movement therapy: A perspective from Yin Yang/Taoist concepts to Laban effort shape analysis" shared her ideas to explain when dance becomes therapy and how we can take advantage of the energy around us to create new experiences. According to Marcia, the energy is transitional and different uses of it through movement and dance can lead to a better understanding of "knowing oneself"; something that was further demonstrated in practice during her workshop. Marcia also encouraged us to start developing a better awareness of our bodies and to use them as a creative tool which can connect us with the world and the people around us. Hopefully, this could help us to create healthier and more constructive relationships with ourselves and others.

Afterwards, Steve Harvey, presenting the technique of 'Physical Storytelling as a form of experiential learning' provided us with the principle background and gave us the chance to develop Physical Storytelling in practice. Working with the participants in pairs, Steve encouraged us to share the experiences that happened to us throughout the day. The pairs were given a piece of paper and were asked to draw lines which could illustrate their experiences, thus they communicated with their partners sending verbal and non-verbal messages. When this stage was over, an act was created based on body movements which could 'tell' the story of the lines as depicted on the paper. Physical Storytelling was a great technique to 'break the ice' for Chinese and non-Chinese participants to communicate, come closer and learn about each other's experiences.

2. Presentations

The symposium's presentations were focused on various implementations of arts in education and therapy. There were striking examples of presentations focused on the expressive arts therapy and education, dance and movement therapy, drama therapy, music education and music therapy. Other important issues to be mentioned were about the psychology of cultures and religions as reflected in the arts. For instance, we looked at how Laban movement (LBMS) and Shaman dance would bring the beliefs of animism and totemism into our bodies, into the way we dance and the way we move. This helped us realise what would be the therapeutic value behind these practices.

Regardless of which field of arts they represented, all presentations had some common elements. The first one was the need to observe our bodies and listen to our needs carefully, hence to respect what our bodies are 'trying to say'. In so doing, we would also be closer to the second common element, the human ability to self-reflect. All forms of arts could take us a step closer to self-exploration, self-integration and self-cognition. The third highlighted the common element that had to do with the importance to change

people's attitudes and perspectives of education, therapy and arts, while listening to the call for further innovations in these fields.

3. Research projects

A significant number of the presentations introduced us to the latest research findings, as well. A combination of qualitative, quantitative, art-based and child-centred research methods provided us with a more holistic understanding of the issues under investigation. As far as the Dance and Movement Therapy (DMT) is concerned, research has been conducted with children in the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and we were able to learn more about the new innovations and their outcomes. In different contexts, when DMT was applied at high schools in order to alleviate school violence, research findings illustrated that students started to develop body awareness, empathy and to respect each other's boundaries. They gradually began to control their anger and handle their difficult emotions, consequently the aggressive behaviours were reduced. In all research projects, DMT was correlated with the children's increased degree of self-esteem and self-confidence.

Research projects also included music education as applied to pre-school students, rhythm courses to students at universities of special education and the correlation between play and primary school children from different social status groups. Some issues were on how to inform adults about the impact of their perspectives and how to motivate both adults and students to learn more about the arts in education and in therapy. In one of the recommendations it was supported that a combination of classroom teaching and extracurricular arts would be a beneficial new teaching method to attract students' interests and attention. In other projects, very specific issues were examined, such as how a biometric analysis of toes can be used as a sign of specific elements in people's personalities. On these grounds, all presentations gave different perspectives on the creative arts in various educational and therapeutic contexts.

4. Workshops

As far as the workshops are concerned, it may be especially worthy to focus on the techniques that Marcia Plevin and Steve Harvey implemented. In regards to Marcia's workshop, attendants had been given the chance to dance and think more critically about the boundaries between dance and dance movement therapy. They also had the chance to come closer to their bodies so as to gain a deeper insight into themselves and a better understanding of the people and the environment around them. The aim during the workshop was to examine the connection between Western modern dance and dance movement with the Eastern Taoist perspectives of moving energy, under the spectrum of Laban's effort shape analysis. Furthermore, as Marcia stated, her personal goal was to illustrate the shift in mental and physical attitudes in order to move through that transition. Therefore, based on the Taoist principles of Yin and Yang as stimuli to encourage self-knowledge and movement improvisation, participants had the opportunity to explore and feel the Qi energy and its importance, either in the role of a dancer or a dance movement therapist.

It was made clear that, even though elements of the nature might be used in a different manner in Eastern and Western philosophies, they still ‘share’ several common aspects. In order for the participants to more deeply understand this idea, the workshop was divided into shorter parts which were all creatively connected at the end. Thus, they worked individually, in small groups and later, altogether in the large group. A number of creative techniques, such as writing, drawing and poetry making, were implied as a tool for reflection on the happenings during the workshop.

Steve Harvey in his first workshop, introduced the technique of physical storytelling which was based on a combination of methods; from authentic movement, contact and dance improvisation to dynamic play therapy and playback theatre. During the workshop, a storyteller recounted stories which were actual events, then cases and questions followed in an effort to be answered through dancing, while dancers had to improvise that story. The main idea was to separate the verbal content from the dancing. Afterwards, the audience would project an emotional aspect on the dancer in order to make the dance a moving metaphor. Dancers had the chance to implement various dance improvisation techniques, such as physical cues from their dance interactions to develop new dances spontaneously. In the end of the workshop, it was understandable how the improvisations could create a dance of a ‘story under the story’ or a metaphorical version of the verbal content. In addition, some basic improvisation scores – also known as structures – were implemented. A striking example was the three solos as an attempt to reflect on a narrative. More specifically, the scores were three stops, three solos, the journey and the fairy tale.

The second workshop was focused on a technique applied in small groups. Two dancers were placed into a body shape or a sculpture. This was the beginning of a short improvisation in order to reflect case material in one group and the question of ‘How arts education should be used with adults’ in the other group. The resulting dance episodes were the stimuli that encouraged participants to discuss many issues that arise when it comes to teaching teenagers, the different approaches that can be put into practice, transference issues as well as the decision making about the cases.

Both workshops helped participants to put the knowledge they gained during the presentations into practice and to feel with their own senses the personal and professional advantages of creative and therapeutic arts.

5. Contribution of the symposium

All the proceedings have been published in the ISCAET journal, including articles from Shaun McNiff titled “*Presentations that Look and Feel Like the Arts in Therapy: Keeping Creative Tension with Psychology*”, the professor Liu Mingming in the “*Application and Development of Music Therapy in China*”, Doctor Li Da in the “*Art Therapy in Hospitals in China*” and the professor Dong Fang regarding “*The enquiry-based Learning with Students as the Main Body*”. A total of fifty-one abstracts are available; among others, it is worthy mentioning the: “*Reflections of an Inter-cultural DMT Trainer in Europe and China*” by Susan Scarth, “*Between Drama Education and Drama Therapy: International Approaches to Successful Navigation (Extract)*” by Andrew Gaines, Jason Butler and Clive Holmwood, “*The National Centre for Dance Therapy of Les Grands Ballets*

Canadiens de Montreal: a Holistic Approach” by Christian Senechal, “*Cultural Impasses for Dance Movement Psychotherapists Practicing in India*” by Rashi Bijlani and “*Sociometric Status and Play: a Cross-cultural Study in the UK, Greece and China*” by Zoe Moula.

We hope that in the spirit of a symposium aiming to disseminate the knowledge and the recent research findings regardless of the geographical constraints, all participants had the chance to share their interest and their passion, to find new incentives for the development of further innovations and to enjoy the experience of putting theory into practice. We also hope that the symposium – as being the first of its kind – has contributed to a better understanding of Western and Eastern practices and approaches, in a sense of sharing our cultures which, no matter how different they are, they also have many elements in common.

In the end, throughout the symposium, the importance of art-based mental health care, psychotherapeutic and educational interventions was highlighted. It seems that, in China, as well as in most Western and Eastern countries, there will always be space for improvement and several gaps to be filled, such as which criteria could potentially develop an art-based approach into an art-based therapy. However, as long as people are willing to come along from all around the world to discuss, to learn, to explore, to inspire and motivate others, we could be optimistic that all the goals we set will be gradually achieved.

About the author

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