

CONFERENCE REVIEW 会议综述报道

British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT) and American Art Therapy Association (AATA) Art Therapy Practice and Research Conference, London, UK, 2019
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Abstract

Six art therapists belonging to the Asian Art Therapy Network give their personal reflections on the International Art Therapy Practice Research Conference, which took place in London, 2019. In common is the importance given to collaboration, cooperation and developing a sense of community.

Keywords: International, art therapy, conference, Asia, collaboration, multicultural, research, practice

摘要

出席2019年于伦敦召开的国际美术治疗实践研究会议后,六位属于亚洲美术治疗联盟的美术治疗师进行了个人回顾与思考。不约而同地提出了重视合作,相互协同和发展社区意识的观点和建议。

关键词: 国际性, 美术治疗, 会议, 亚洲, 合作, 多元文化, 研究, 实践

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Reflections on the International Art Therapy Conference, London 2019

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We are living in a globalized world in which we operate on an international scale. A world in which interaction and relationships between people for business, knowledge, and information have become more and more linked and, despite our differences, we have much in common. Political, social, economic, and environmental globalization encourage us to communicate and collaborate on multiple levels. Together with this, however, we are witnessing a rise in isolationism. Trump in the United States and Brexit in the United Kingdom are two examples of a move away from this global

cooperation toward a world in which there is identification with one's own nation, often to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of the other. Of course, this move to and from nationalism to globalism and vice versa is not limited to these countries. The struggle for democracy in Hong Kong is currently flaring, with protestors fighting for their rights for a globalized democracy while at the same time acknowledging their national identity.

It is against this political backdrop that on July 11–13, 2019, the International Art Therapy Practice and Research Conference 2019 was held in London. The conference was organized by the British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT) and joined by the American Association of Art Therapy (AATA). Despite the historical flight from global cooperation, the collaboration between the two associations and the attendance by more than 400 delegates from 36 countries pointed toward a desire to broaden horizons, learn from each other, and extend our practice, rather than limit it. Art therapists gathered from across the globe; North America, Europe, South America, the Middle East, Asia, Australia, and New Zealand were all represented. They brought with them their passion for art therapy and a willingness and desire to cooperate.

This journal, *Creative Arts in Education and Therapy (CAET)* — Eastern and Western Perspective, focuses on the mutual relationship between the East and the West, while advocating this same global perspective. It supports a move away from our insular thinking in favor of increasing awareness and the acknowledgment of “shared human qualities that pervade the arts while encouraging and respecting the infinite differences of artists and their expressions” (McNiff, 2015). As a result of the significant number of art therapists from across Asia at the conference, an Asian Art Therapy Network was spearheaded by Tony Zhou, founder and executive editor of *CAET*. Zhou aimed to provide an opportunity for Asian art therapists attending this conference to support each other in their endeavors to grow the profession, specifically in countries in which it was in its infancy. The five art therapists reviewing this conference for *CAET* all have connections with Asia and joined the network.

As is evident from the conference, cross-cultural encounter is increasingly relevant to our profession as more and more art therapists are studying and/or working in countries other than their own. Levine (2018) explores the notion of cross-cultural encounter and asks what it means to *encounter* each other. He refers to Jean-Luc Nancy, who tried to understand encounter in terms of *nearness* by writing, “I like to think about the encounter between art therapist from all over the world in terms of ‘nearness’...in which two parties are neither the same nor different; rather we are near to each other, touching but not merging, taking and giving at the same time” (p. 85).

It is this *nearness* that we see expressed in the reflections on the international conference. This global gathering focused on this idea of “taking and giving at the same time” (Levine, 2018, p. 85) while acknowledging that it is our points of difference that lead to depth and interest. Indeed, this was expressed in the five reviews on the conference, which hold common thread—the joy of meeting, of encounter. Kelly speaks of the coming of age of a profession that evolved differently in the West compared to the East and in the United



The gathering of arts therapists from Asia and other parts of world during BAAT Conference in London, July 2019

States (which is diverse in itself) to Europe and the willingness to “burst our bubbles” and look toward each other for inspiration. Kaimal speaks of “building international communities” so that we can discuss the challenges we have in common, be supported in our common struggles, and share in our understandings. Della Cagnoletta speaks about “expanding our dialogues” and broadening our perspective of what art therapy is. Alfonso is interested in networking toward “cross-cultural collaboration.” Lay, program leader of the master’s degree program at Lasalle College of Arts in Singapore, reflects on art therapists who return to their home countries and find themselves pioneers and at times isolated, seeking a balance between their Western training and adaptations to the local concepts and traditions of healing. The conference reminded us that despite the social trends and move away from internationalization among part of our world communities, art therapists still value encounters, and that no matter the culture to which we belong or country in which we live, art and art in healing remain relevant.

A connected, but somewhat different aspect upon which I would like to reflect is my observation of a subject fundamental to art therapy — that of art itself. As I listened to the conference presentations and looked at the art being shown, I was reminded that art is a part of our daily life and, as such, reflects our social definitions. That our social definitions are reflected in our art therapy practice is not new and has increasingly become a political concern within the profession, but that *art* itself mirrors this too is perhaps less addressed.

Rinder (2006), a former curator of the Whitney Museum, speaks about art as “reflecting vestiges of racism, sexism and classism...” and as reflecting “myths of hierarchy” (1.33/7.38) that enact “myths of inclusion and exclusion” (1.33/7.38). Definitions like “craft, untrained art and outsider arts” (1.58/7.38) embody these social constructs. It is interesting to consider not only our approaches to art therapy as holding and reflecting these hierarchies and constructs, but also our attitude toward art itself. While in art therapy we are not concerned with “high” art or “good art” (1.58/7.38), students and teachers still enter into the process with deep-set ideas of what art is. Our initial work as art therapists involves engaging with and at times quelling the fears of clients, as well as trainee art therapists, of art itself which results from the preconceptions we hold about what art is and the subsequent limitations we place on ourselves.

When reviewing the art I observed as emerging out of the art therapy practice as presented, the conference highlighted for me that no matter what culture or country, there was a trend toward conventional approaches to the art and art making; I would even be so bold as to suggest a sometimes unimaginative use of materials. Although social and cultural constructs and collaborations were eloquently addressed in the workshops and presentations I was able to attend, I came across very few examples of varied, adaptive, perhaps indigenous or even creative art making. The generic, almost formulaic range of materials stemming from a Western (North American, Northern European) perspective was notable, expressly *because* of the range of countries and cultures represented at the conference.

There were of course exceptions to this rule, for example, natural materials, found objects, film, Chinese calligraphy, and small bricks, among others. A presentation on materials as exemplified by bricks was given by Lloyd, Usiskin, and Press. Their work takes place in northern France, with refugees surviving on the France–UK border in small makeshift encampments regularly cleared by the police. They showed how the use of miniature building bricks allowed for the creation of environments that could be temporarily created and then returned to the box. The use of these miniature bricks allowed refugees to engage and create temporary forms that seemed to fill a need to imagine different worlds. This provided a moment in time that left little concrete trace and mirrored their precarious existence. In my own work in refugee camps, I have found that the use of found objects or even the mobile phone, a device everybody has today, can be just two examples of the art media used (along with tablets or other digital technologies) in these often dire contexts.

Future gatherings akin to the international conference can offer explicit opportunities for us to challenge our preconceptions of what comprises art. This seems applicable to all countries and is perhaps as much about cross-cultural sensitivity as about challenging the assumptions, values, and beliefs that exist in our cultures around the making of art itself. Looking at our own skills, imagination, and social relevance may cause discomfort, but could perceivably expand our profession, our application, our collaborations, broaden our encounters, and, more importantly, our imagination. Thinking and doing is fundamental for questioning or pushing the boundaries of our tool. To this end, the conference in London was an excellent forum.

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In the summer of 2017, I received an e-mail asking if I would be interested in attending an international art therapy conference, and if so, would I want to discuss it further with a small group of art therapists from the United States and the United Kingdom who were thinking about bringing together art therapists from all over the world for a global gathering conference. I remember I responded right away in the affirmative. The possibility of connecting art therapists from all over the world was very exciting and inspiring. It was unprecedented and could help us engage with each other as a global force, rather than as isolated pockets and efforts.

We began e-mail discussions, met at the American Art therapy Association annual meeting in Albuquerque, NM, in the fall of 2017, and a steering committee led by Dr. Val Huet, CEO of the British Association of Art Therapists, was formed. Together we listed names and contact information for art therapists we knew all over the world and reached out to them to gather ideas, themes, questions, and concerns. From these initial exchanges, a call for proposals was issued in Fall 2018 in collaboration with the conference management systems of the American Art Therapy Association. Initially, there were only a trickle of abstract submissions, but as the deadline drew closer, hundreds of submissions flooded in. It was exciting and promising. With over 200 sessions and presentations accepted, I remember registering on the very first day that the call opened in January 2019.

I grew up in India but have lived in the United States for the past 20 years. I realized that I was the only non-White person on the steering committee and spoke from my experiences of teaching in the United States as well as leading workshops and teaching art therapy in India. Even though I represented the United States for the meeting, all other steering committee members and I had deep roots outside of the United States, including from Algeria, Canada, India and Argentina. I often wondered about my role. Rather than my Indian identity, I think that my researcher and educator identities emerged stronger at the meeting. My Indian identity is often manifested in my willingness and interest to holding pluralistic perspectives, of being at home and yet being an outsider all over the world. I am not of India alone anymore; I am of the United States, of my collaborative research trajectory, of my global travels, and of my motherhood to my daughters and mentorship of my students (Kaimal, 2015). I felt able to bring all these selves to the steering committee and the conference itself.

The conference, in my view successfully combined practice innovations, master classes and creative explorations of media with presentations on research and theory. While I attended sessions of colleagues I knew from previous meetings and met new collaborators from Israel, Hong Kong, Australia, the Netherlands, and the Philippines, some of my most meaningful conversations happened in the corridors over coffee breaks. We unpacked the politics of journals and the implications of global networks. We hugged

old and long-lost friends and colleagues and caught up further in the nearby pubs and coffee shops. We lamented the struggles and tensions of the territorial battles we fight with each other while we stay marginalized and misunderstood by most of the world.

When I reflect back on the conference, a theme that comes up for me is that of *privilege*. I felt privileged to have been able to do all of this. What a privilege to be proficient in English; to be from the United States and India; to be able to share my work in art therapy, neuroscience, and research on a conference keynote (Kaimal, 2019); to have my family with me to go home to so I would not be lonely; to be able travel with funds from my university. When I was a child in India, the farthest I had been to was Nepal. International travel was a distant dream and unattainable except for the very wealthy. I felt so lucky to be able to travel and wondered about others like me who are not yet able to do that. In addition, the steering committee members also presented our reports back at the annual meeting of the American Art Therapy Association in Kansas City, MO on October 31st, 2019. It reinforced for me the value of and desire worldwide among art therapists to be connected as a professional community. We each have a responsibility to support and encourage others who aspire to their own dreams. To that end, my wish for the future is to have more digital options so that those who cannot travel can still attend virtual sessions, learn from a distance, and perhaps feel a sense of community that many of us often do not have in our work.

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On July 10, 2019, a pre-conference meeting was organized by BAAT and hosted by Val Huet to provide networking and sharing of ideas and experiences to about 40 art therapists from all over the world. This creative conversation started several months before the actual day of the meeting, initiated by a long e-mail exchange about themes and topics that could be of interest for the pre-conference meeting. The discussion contained open questions and thoughts about what was needed in our profession, the specific development of art therapy in each country, the challenges we face, and the implications for further growth.

It explored three major themes: the first one, which identified the idea of a conference, was about research, which studies can prove the effectiveness and the meaningfulness of art therapy interventions; the second was a desire to explore how “many faces” does art therapy have around the world; the third, which may come as a consequence of enquiring about the various modalities we use in our work, was to discuss supervision. With these thoughts in mind, we arrived at the meeting. The setting of our encounter consisted of several round tables, where the participants started their discussions in small subgroups. On one side the subgroups emphasized unity and similarity of intents, while on the other the complexity and specificity of each country appeared during the description of the state of art therapy. In this context, how do we cooperate?

If cooperation is “an embodied craft which is conveyed by social rituals” (Sennet, 2012), we, as art therapists, should possess adequate skills for cooperation and collaboration. Not only do we constantly deal with embodiment while we use art media or through our experiential style of teaching and learning through doing, but we also use situations like conference, meetings, and interventions as our rituals to connect.

During our meeting, we experienced the importance of dialogue and mutuality: Whenever “real dialogue involves an encounter between people or voices or ‘utterances’ that are outside of each other” (Wegerif, 2017), thinking becomes open ended and allows for distinct ideas to emerge, feeding from each other and ever evolving as time flows and knowledge becomes more profound.

As Sennet (2012) says, “The dialogic conversation... prospers through empathy, the sentiment of curiosity about who other people are in themselves.” It generates greater awareness of new possibilities, where knowledge comes from inside in a “expanded dialogical space” (Wegerif, 2017), that is not only determined by thoughts, but broadened by the relational experiences.¹

This was the atmosphere that permeated our meeting and defined the direction of our discussion on the topic of supervision.² We promoted a view of supervision not as a “bird’s eye view” of an expert on a problematic case, but as an exchange of different points of view, a work of co-researchers reflecting on the same situation.

What if we use this image of co-researchers to define our common goals in our multicultural group? And which objective should we have?

It could be an ideal to promote and develop a “cultural ecology—the healthy interdependence of all people within society” (Chen’s interview with Hailing, 2018, page 19), but it could also be the underlying motive of all our enterprises, especially when the challenges are so high.³

The community we have started to create needs to have a common objective, something that comes from bottom up, from our daily experience, how we feel to live in the world we live (Harvey, Zhou, Kelly, & Wittig, 2018), not to reach a symbiotic merge of our ideas and experiences, but to enlarge our vision and to connect within a more vast field, not limited by the (often unnatural) borders maps offer us.

Romans used to print on their maps, outside of their territories, the sentence “*Hic Sunt Leones*” (*Here live lions*) to indicate the unknown and dangerous world.

If we remain constrained inside this dialectic of known-unknown, we risk a negative outcome: If the unfamiliar is already familiar, there is no need to explore it, and vice versa; if the familiar is also unfamiliar, we feel unsure in our own world (Preta, 2019). We need to create a space between the two opposites, a potential space for multirelational creative thinking.

When Milner (2005, p. 66) said that these ever-present opposites are stored in every creative mind and define “moments when the original ‘poet’ in each of us created the

¹ This “expanded dialogical space” shares many characteristics with the “potential space” or “transitional space” Winnicott (1971) defined.

² On this topic, Val Huet presented her considerations and thoughts.

³ An example was given at the meeting by Bobby Lloyd and Debra Kalmanowitz with the Art Refuge Project.

outside world for us, by finding the familiar in the unfamiliar,” she was referring to a process of connection with the other that is moved and kept alive by imagination and curiosity. It is a way of describing a dialogical field where familiar and unfamiliar generate different experiences, each crossing borders and bringing new horizons. I think this is the space that our newly formed art therapists community should inhabit.

Jo Kelly

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As the most recent past President, Chair, and Acting Executive Officer of the Australian, New Zealand, and Asian Creative Arts Therapies Association (ANZACATA), I attended the conference on the back of a life transition: returning to live back in my country of birth. I have lived and worked all over the world in places such as India, Papua New Guinea, Bangladesh, and America, but for over 20 years, I have made Australia my home. In light of the challenging times we live in, my recent personal changes, and after attending the conference, it got me thinking of how much we can live in a bubble. Minding our own lives, mixing with like-minded people with like-minded views. This can be an insular perspective if that is all we wish for. Sameness does not challenge; sameness can be comfortable and safe. But, in reality, life is dynamic and ever-changing, eventually forcing us to change and adapt. Sometimes, this is welcomed; sometimes, it is not. When it is not, often it is the grist of our work as therapists.

This conference warmly welcomed delegates from all over the world, reflecting a wonderful diversity that exemplifies McNiff’s view that the creative art therapies have more that unites than divides us. At the core of all of us attending is the value placed on human creativity, both in quality of life and in healing; that our practice as art therapists can harness this quality. Also, that there are other ways to communicate and show the healing nature of the arts therapies. By using innovative research, we can shine a different kind of research lens on our work and attempt to capture what is so special about this form of therapy.

I have been part of the arts therapy community in Australia for many years, seeing my professional organization grow and develop, not without significant challenges, to encompass wholeheartedly the diversity of practice, training, and research and to evolve into the dynamic and flexible organization it is today. I have reflected on the diversity of our own conferences and symposia in recent years in Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore, and it is wonderful to see many familiar presenters from all over the world who have been keynote speakers, workshop facilitators, presenters, and attendees at our conferences in the past. Meeting friends and colleagues from these other places was the highlight of the conference for me.

We know the roots of art therapy have evolved differently in the West compared with the East. Europe’s history has taken a different theoretical pathway in relation

to that of the United States and Canada. Bubbles existed then between theoretical perspectives and among modalities of music, dance, drama, and visual arts. Now, arts therapies are maturing as a profession, and significant contributions can be made by bursting bubbles and looking outward and East to see how the arts can contribute to the profession. The Eastern arts and cultures have something important to offer the West that is highly congruent to our core values of creativity and the different ways of communicating with each other.

One significant memory of the conference was of sitting in a small workshop group studying an image on a screen that was discussed by us all. As instructed by the presenter, we were asked to talk about the painting and pondered on it at length. Our group comprised of seven—each originating from other places, with different languages, histories, and perspectives. The discussion of the paintings elicited many perspectives. Respect, cooperation, and, indeed, delight and wonder at our different viewpoints were the features I remember.

Many perspectives need to be harnessed, respected, and valued. This is an imperative in this day and age where binary thinking, extremism, and intolerance appears to be making inroads in many societies. The creative arts therapies can take a note out of the success of this conference as it develops into the future. We can learn from each other and draw upon each other's strengths. We can share research ideas and foster collaboration, not only within our own profession and modalities but with other related professions. The work of Patricia Leavy (2011) is particularly relevant in her work on transdisciplinarity research, which requires “innovation, creativity and flexibility” (p. 9). Leavy's (p. 30) six principles of transdisciplinary research are particularly congruent to creative therapists. Such principles are based on real-life issues and utilize a synergistic and holistic approach. By placing the problem at the center of the research, emergent concepts and methodological frameworks are developed. In turn, these contribute toward transcendence of traditional disciplinary perspectives. The result can be flexibility and openness to new ideas and insights and, thus, innovation in building new theoretical concepts.

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The BAAT 2019 International Conference offered an excellent platform for art therapists from around the globe to connect and to learn from each other. I gained valuable perspectives about the current ways in which art therapists practice and offer art therapy training in their specific contexts/countries. The conference offered opportunities to collaborate cross-culturally – particularly between countries where art therapy has been firmly established and those where it is just beginning to flourish.

The opportunity to network began even prior to the conference, at the meeting of international therapists on July 10, 2019. During the whole-day session, round-table

discussions were organized to support collaborative learning about the opportunities and challenges in establishing art therapy in countries where the seeds of art therapy are being planted. All continents were represented – with art therapists hailing from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America, and the Middle East. Existing training programs in each country were presented and offered perspective on the varying stages at which programs are operating in the countries represented. There was an expressed desire for collaboration and an opportunity to share challenges in training development, education, advocacy, and practice. It was particularly interesting to learn how so many art therapists practice outside of their home countries, and the layered experiences these bring to the work. The rich exchanges offered us the chance to gain validation and clarity about their respective projects and approaches.

During the preconference meeting, as a practitioner working both in the Philippines and other third world nations, I identified particularly with art therapists from developing countries who expressed the common need in their contexts to create awareness among mental health practitioners and the general public, about the difference between art education, therapeutic art activities, and art therapy. A subject that resonated with me was the question of how to support untrained people who were already practicing as art therapists, for them to gain training. The ethical concerns that emerged from this gap in awareness and adequate art therapy training were briefly touched on but merit more attention. The need to uphold the standards of the profession and to honor the rigorous training of credentialed therapists is pressing, as the awareness of the practice of art therapy has increased with the global spotlight on mental health.

During the conference proper, I was involved in both the panel on education innovation and a presentation on school-based art therapy. The panel offered a platform for discussions on the use of technology to bridge the learning gap among art therapy trainers and teachers in under resourced countries with no access to continuing education opportunities. The presentation, which I shared with Deirdre McConnel from the United Kingdom, offered an opportunity for a robust discussion on our shared frameworks on the relationship between the therapist, teacher, student, and the art and the process of meaning making. Deirdre practices in the British school system, while I practice mostly in crisis-affected under-resourced schools. Despite the difference in our contexts, we found that our practice frameworks overlapped. This dialogue was one of the numerous encounters that reflected the richness of the conference and its success in creating a space for meaningful connections so essential to the thriving of art therapists and experiencing the joy of being in the field of art therapy as a whole.

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Increasingly, art therapy is being developed, established, and practiced across global landscapes in ways that are just as diverse, rich, and layered as the cultures, contexts,

and terrain that are found therein (Kelly, Levey, & Lay, 2017; Lay, 2018). Art therapists are a creative and adventurous lot, and so it is not surprising that many have temporarily traversed and/or even translocated to new regions of the world to introduce and anchor the discipline. This has served to ignite the imagination and interest of others to also take up training themselves so that they too can practice.

For those new art therapists who needed to go overseas for training, they often return home as pioneers and are quick to find themselves seemingly isolated with a range of challenges that may include nonacceptance by other professionals within the local mental health landscape, little to no access for funding and/or employment, no relevant credentialing board nor equivalent professional art therapy organization to advocate for their professional needs, including ongoing professional development; some even return to no formalized mental health infrastructure to support art therapy services (Lay, 2018). Understandably, their enthusiasm and energy may be diminished and even depleted. The BAAT/AATA conference was, hence, timely, critical, much needed, and very well received by global participants. The conference provided community, collegiality, and a common ground to collectively consider the discipline of art therapy as well as the future direction that it may take.

Many art therapy conferences are international in scope; however, the inaugural BAAT/AATA conference can be considered global as it purposefully ensured the inclusion, input, and active engagement of practitioners, researchers, academics, and participants from around the world. It was heartening to meet a good number of art therapists and students, many of whom traveled quite extensively to attend and greet global peers and acquaintances and, to my pleasant surprise, a peer from my own cohort, and to mingle with the various writers and researchers who so diligently ground the profession. It was a very special honor indeed to not only present a community arts project at this conference with one of my graduates, but to additionally see so many of our international alumni in the conference catalogue and to be a part of an art therapy homecoming of sorts.

Singapore's strong presence at this conference is a testament to the significant competence, confidence, and contributions that are being made in this part of the world. In my current position as Programme Leader of a postgraduate art therapy training programme in Singapore, I have been honored and privileged to train new generations of art therapists in Southeast Asia (and abroad) in contexts that are relevant and meaningful to this region, to provide informed consultation and input into developing art therapy practices, trainings, and professional art(s) therapy organizations in this part of the world, and to witness the profound work that is being developed, pioneered, and practiced by Asia-based and Asia-trained art therapists.

Since 2011, I have observed an incredible shift in Singapore's seemingly overreliance on and preoccupation with expertise from the West to acknowledging, celebrating, and showcasing the work that is emerging from the East in terms of art therapy practice. This is humbling to witness as there is much to learn from local concepts and traditions of healing, wellness and wellbeing, creativity, and creative expression. Equally so is the (re)interpretation of Western-based theories into Eastern understandings, ways of being and ways of working with others through art and creative means (Kelly, Levey, & Lay, 2017; Lay, 2018).

The BAAT/AATA conference welcomed and embraced a full range of participants, celebrating diverse perspectives, stimulating new ideas, and instigating new possibilities for collaboration and research. It was briefly discussed that given the nature and aims of this conference, the conference might rotate between countries and regions of the globe. As such, Singapore was volunteered as a future venue and host. What a wonderful opportunity it would be, to bring the West to the East.

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