

ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

Editorial

Professor Arnell Etherington and Dr Robin Tipple

In this issue we are able to publish five research papers. I am happy to report that we can continue with explorations present in our last publication. We are able to show how research, which here, includes the experimental and case study research, that attends to the image, the objects present in art therapy, the non-verbal communication and the thinking that the processes of making facilitates in the setting, can move our understanding forward in fruitful and stimulating ways. The final research paper explores the image of art therapy itself and makes use of the internet and social media sites.

Memory is essential to thinking and Unnur Ottarsdottir's research paper gives a clear description of how experiment demonstrates that memory is improved considerably for children when actively engaged in drawing. More importantly her thoughtful and careful case study shows how the bodily aspect of engagement in art making, which recovers past experience and is productive of insight, facilitates learning by a memorisation which has more durability. Affect is clearly important to this process, and it may not come as a surprise for art therapists, that ideas, and more importantly images, embody feeling and contain a particular energy thereby. But what Unnur has been able show others is why cognitive frames, or postulates, need the addition of

psychodynamic thinking if knowledge achieved through experimental studies are to be translated into effective practice in the school setting.

Unnur explored the value of a psychodynamic art therapy in the school setting and Fran Nielsen in her case study demonstrates how a 'Responsive Art Psychotherapy' can provide a particularly supportive and containing experience for the adolescent who is recovering from trauma in an 'extended adolescent in-patient unit'. The unit has difficulty in providing therapy for adolescents whose emotional world is often only present in a disassociated form. Fran describes her work with the whole family and the client which, in a measured and carefully attuned form, attending to non-verbal exchanges, moves slowly towards some discussion. Fran, alongside family members and the client, uses her own art making to begin the process whereby interpretations can be creatively shared. The case study is rich in imagery and Fran's insightful comment alongside the illustrations helps the reader appreciate the movement in the developing therapeutic relationship that is critical in this work.

With Kathleen Connellan's paper we are returned to memory, memory towards the end of life when the mind has become more fractured and memory difficult to access. Kathleen in her literature review explores the importance of all the senses, touch, taste and sound as well as vision, in the recovery of memory. She gives the reader a good account of the literature relating to work with older patients suffering from dementia and in particular she outlines the development of the theory of 'gerotranscendence'. This theory is used to frame her moving case study which shows how her patient, who was involved in the joint production of a collage, was able to relive in the present past moments that enabled her to move towards enlightened self-knowledge. The physicality and sensory qualities of things, of sounds through singing, of touch through the handling of objects, was central to this process.

Catherine Miller and Christopher Brown present a very interesting and sensitive case study relating to work with a 46 year old man seen in a

homeless project. The case presented particular difficulties because the client often came to the session intoxicated. But by paying particular attention to enactments within the transference relationship, and by working hard to unpack the countertransference through the use of art making in supervision, Catherine and Chris were able to show how the non-verbal communication developed. 'Maternal function' in art therapy was able to operate and the work of the client became productive of meaning. Despite being often in 'a chaotic state of mind' the client was able to achieve symbolic expression thus communicating more 'coherently' to others and to himself.

Theresa Van Lith's paper presents a content analysis of comment in relation to art therapy found on 58 websites. The understanding that art therapy 'enables non-verbal self-expression' is widespread. This is linked to the knowledge that it opens up 'fragile emotions' and is helpful when other treatments fail. The findings in Theresa's research do positively link to the clinical research presented in this issue. However, Theresa points out that it was not always clear how individuals gained information on art therapy. There was some desire for 'solid evidence' in relation to the value of art therapy and there was also some expression of concern in relation to risk. Theresa provides a full discussion of the material and findings in her paper and she provides some thoughtful suggestions in relation to the professional need to ensure that users of a service can make 'critically informed decisions about their healthcare.'

We have two reports from the field in this issue. First we have a very moving account of the creation of an art therapy service in response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy by Susan Rudnik. Susan's courageous work should be publicised and Susan herself, as a member of the community which has so grievously suffered, is well placed to provide, as she does, a very clear account of the social and political nature of this calamity. We urge people to read it.

Secondly Christopher Brown, Jenny Gibbons, Ety Matthews, Dean Reddick, Rosemary Sawyer, and Ros Taylor have provided the journal with some

thoughtful reflections on a workshop organised by ATOL to encourage writing. We intend to follow this workshop with a conference in October to be held in central London which we hope will allow for a larger gathering of art therapists engaged in exploring the problems of writing art therapy. See the flyer in this issue.

We have, as usual, some interesting reviews of literature in this issue, which include a consideration of reflections on aesthetic experience, working across cultures, and across modalities in the arts therapies.

It has been an enriching experience to help in the preparation and editing of this issue, reading the very stimulating papers, reports and reviews, has given us confidence that we can offer our readers some substantial content to encourage debate and enlarge understanding.

We now have a mailing list that you can subscribe to, which will enable notification of each new issue of ATOL and any future events we may host. This can be found under contact in the home page menu bar. We will also be upgrading our publishing software, Open Journals System, to version 3 in the near future in time for the 10th anniversary of our founding in 2019.