



Remembering and Returning through Drawing in Therapy and Education

Unnur Guðrún Óttarsdóttir

The emerging role of drawing as a powerful tool to enhance memory recall, particularly in individuals with varied capacities for memorising written words, will be explored in the workshop. Grounded in recent research, the session highlights how drawing facilitates long-term retention of words not only for those who struggle with text-based memorisation but also for those who initially excel in it. By externalising internal images through visual expression, drawing becomes a form of cognitive and emotional rehearsal that returns the encoded words drawn to conscious memory through the symbol, shape, and image.

Application of memory drawing in therapeutic settings with traumatised children will be reviewed. Trauma can disrupt memory function and fragment narrative continuity. Nonetheless, through repeated engagement with image-making, children are often able to access and reconstruct personal meaning, integrate fragmented memories, and enhance their capacity for learning. This process of visual repetition and symbolic return creates opportunities not only for therapeutic processing and integration but also for improved academic engagement.

Case material will be presented on how memory drawing can be integrated into both art therapy education and clinical practice, offering a dual function: supporting emotional well-being and enhancing memory-based learning. Participants will engage in experiential drawing activity to deepen their understanding of the mechanisms of memorising through drawing and experiencing the way in which the research was conducted.

In alignment with the conference theme, the workshop reflects on how repetition and return through visual image-making can serve as a bridge between memory, education and the therapeutic process.



Biography

Unnur G. Óttarsdóttir, PhD, has practiced art therapy in various institutions for thirty-five years. She is also a researcher at the Reykjavik Academy in Iceland. Óttarsdóttir has taught art therapy in universities and associations internationally and she is the manager on an educational committee for the Icelandic Association of Art Therapists, which is working toward setting up an art therapy education. Óttarsdóttir is one of the leading scientists on the subject of memory drawing. Her work has been published worldwide, covering topics such as art therapy, memory drawing, drawing to connect, research through art, and grounded theory methodology. www.unnurarttherapy.is/en

Recent Publications

Óttarsdóttir, U.G. (Expected publication 2025). **Crossdrawing and joint mirror drawing in art therapy and museums.** *The Routledge International Handbook of Art Therapy Practice.* (Chapter 22). New York: Routledge.

Óttarsdóttir, U.G. (2024). **Experiments on the Efficacy of Drawing for Memorization among Adults and Children with Varying Written Word Memory Capacities: A Two-Way Crossover Design.** *Education Sciences*, 14(5), 470.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14050470>

Óttarsdóttir, U.G. (2024). **Memory drawing for children who have experienced stress and/or trauma and have specific learning difficulties.** In: M. Cao, R. Hougham and S. Scoble (Eds.) *Memory: shaping connections in the arts therapies* (pp. 118-141). Oxfordshire: Routledge.