

Decolonizing the curriculum: a research study of resistance in the arts therapies

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In Mahatma Gandhi's words, "a small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history." This paper is an attempt to capture the community spirit embedded within a significant consensus/arts-based research study, to draw out a locally developed curriculum framework, aimed at creating the first Masters programme in creative arts therapies in India. Although research was located in India, it was part of the author's doctoral study at a U.S. University and therefore geo-politically it traversed two different orbits.

At the time of the study (2018) the world was beginning to turn on its axis, and one of the largest associations in the field, The American Art Therapy Association (AATA) was going through a churn that was in direct conflict with values of social justice and inclusion (George et al, 2021). This predicament had far-reaching effects for the field in India in terms of perpetuating a colonial mindset. With the global pandemic, the study entered a VUCA world, one that was volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, where the old rules no longer apply, offering ways that we may resist neoliberal structures and respond to oppressive systems.

Although research was focussed on a Delphi consensus study, the design was hybridized to include an arts-based study, to represent the voices of the participants, which captured nuances that would otherwise not have been possible. Art-making may be experienced in the form of activism, protest, and resistance or as a witness of our times (Moon, 2003).

Therefore, it is as a custodian that I wish to present this research study through the words and images of the research participants for, "we can trust that the images will take us where we need to go and show us what we have to see" (McNiff, 1995).

Biography

Oihika Chakrabarti, DAT, RATH, MFA a pioneer of art therapy in India, is the first Doctor of Art Therapy in the country, having completed her Professional Doctorate in Art Therapy from Mount Mary University, USA. She was awarded the Commonwealth Scholarship in 1997 by Govt. of India to pursue postgraduate training in Art Psychotherapy at Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK. Oihika has twenty-five years of clinical, developmental, rehabilitative, post-disaster/humanitarian and training experience, working in India. Oihika spearheaded the first art psychotherapy clinical service in India at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences's Child Guidance Clinic at Wadia Children's Hospital, Mumbai in 1999. In 2004, Oihika founded Manakhshetra Foundation (art for social change), to expand the scope of the field. Oihika has contributed to numerous international publications on art therapy and her doctoral research on decolonising the curriculum aims to contribute to the creation of the first culturally relevant Masters in Arts Therapy in India. Oihika teaches art therapy on several programmes and is a co-founder and chairperson of The Art Therapy Association of India (www.tatai.in).

Recent publications and conference presentations

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