



In Search of Ithaca: Exploring the Complexity of Creative Arts Therapies

Op Zoek naar Ithaca: de Complexiteit van Vaktherapie Verkennen

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As creative arts therapies gain recognition and empirical support across clinical contexts, new questions emerge: not only if they work, but how, why, and for whom. This panel explores these questions through the lens of Ithaca, as both destination and metaphor. Just as Odysseus' journey was shaped by trials, insights, and transformation, so too are creative arts therapies multifaceted journeys with many interacting components.

Creative arts therapies are complex interventions, involving tailored procedures, diverse patient groups, and varied outcomes. Within these therapies, therapists apply specific actions that can be associated with active elements. An element is considered active when it contributes to an effect, meaning a significant change resulting from an intervention, as measured by a relevant outcome measure. The potential causal relationship between an active element of an intervention and the effect can be explained by the working mechanism. The working mechanism is described as an explanation of how the intervention exerts its effect. More specifically, the neurobiological, psychological and/or physiological processes that underlie the observed effects.

In this panel discussion, we explore how identifying active elements and their potential causal pathways can illuminate the underlying mechanisms. The panel will bring in examples from own research and propose statements on 1) underlying neurobiological mechanisms and its empirical research, 2) the possibility of gaining insight from scoping and systematic reviews using qualitative analyses with artificial intelligence, 3) how active elements and underlying mechanisms help clinical practice. We invite the audience to join us in examining the journey: from intervention to outcome, from practice to understanding, and then, informed by understanding, the journey back to practice again. Rather than asking solely whether



creative arts therapies are effective, we navigate toward Ithaca in order to understand the terrain beneath effectiveness: how change unfolds, why it matters, and what we learn along the way.

Biography

Susan van Hooren, PhD, is a professor in Clinical psychology at the Open University of the Netherlands and associate professor of Creative arts therapies and Psychomotor therapies at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. She serves as the head of KenVaK, collective research center on Creative arts therapies and Psychomotor therapies. She integrates knowledge from psychopathology, psychotherapy, neuropsychological models with theories and practical methods from creative arts therapies. Her work focuses on exploring the effects, active elements and underlying mechanisms of therapies. She supervises PhD candidates, master's and bachelor's students, and has published extensively in the field of creative arts therapies.

Annemarie Abbing, PhD, is an associate professor in Arts Therapies at the University of Applied Sciences Leiden. With a background in art therapy, veterinary public health, and a PhD in clinical neurodevelopmental sciences, her work focuses on strengthening the scientific foundation of arts therapies, particularly in mental health care. She has led research projects on mechanisms of change and the effectiveness of arts therapies in anxiety disorders and forensic populations and publishes regularly in peer-reviewed journals. As scientific advisor for the Dutch Association of Arts Therapies, she contributes to national health care standards. In addition, she supervises students and researchers.

Marc Alexander Willemsen, MA, is a registered drama therapist, psychodramatherapist, group therapist, (consulting) supervisor, and a senior lecturer at the HU University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. He is a PhD candidate at the Open University of the Netherlands, connected to the HU research centre for youth and the collective research centre for Creative arts therapies and Psychomotor therapies, KenVaK. He initiated the shared practice Het Speelvlak, is the vice president of the European Federation of Dramatherapy (EFD) and training co-director of DvT Germany.

Anna-Eva Prick, PhD, is an assistant professor in Clinical psychology at the Open University of the Netherlands, senior researcher of Creative arts therapies and Psychomotor therapies



at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences and connected to and the collective research centre for Creative arts therapies and Psychomotor therapies, KenVaK. Also, she is a practicing geropsychologist at mental health care institution Mondriaan. Her work focuses on exploring the effects, active elements and underlying mechanisms of therapies with a particular emphasis on older adults. She supervises PhD candidates, master's and bachelor's students.

Recent Publications

Abbing, A., Haeyen, S., Nyapati, S., Verboon, P., & Hooren, S.V. (2023). **Effectiveness and mechanisms of the arts therapies in forensic care. A systematic review, narrative synthesis, and meta-analysis.** *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 14, 1128252.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2023.1128252>

Prick, A.-E.J.C., Zuidema, S.U., van Domburg, P., Verboon, P., Vink, A.C., Schols, J.M.G.A., & van Hooren, S. (2024). **Effects of a music therapy and music listening intervention for nursing home residents with dementia: A randomized controlled trial.** *Frontiers in Medicine*, 11, Article 1304349.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fmed.2024.1304349>

Willemsen, M., Abbing, A., Haeyen, S., De Witte, M., & van Hooren, S. (2024). **The creative arts therapists on the continuum of practice within Arts in Health in the Netherlands.** *Dramatherapy, Special Issue: 'Diasporas in Dramatherapy,'* 44(1), 117-124.

https://doi.org/10.1386/dj_00008_1