

Polyvagal theory and creative arts therapies: singing in or out of tune together?

De polyvagale theorie en vaktherapie: zingen ze in of uit de toon samen?

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The neuroscience perspective has gained considerable interest in recent years, especially when it involves explaining the impact of negative stress, anxiety and trauma-related symptoms. One of those perspectives is polyvagal theory, which is emerging as one of the most widely used explanations for the effectiveness of experiential interventions, such as creative arts therapies (CATs). This theory seems to be embraced by art therapists, educators and researchers, as there is a growing global demand for robust scientific substantiation of the effectiveness of CATs. Along with all the positive interest, it also raises some critical questions, such as whether polyvagal theory can indeed be the holy grail, and whether it may fill the gaps in the current theoretical underpinnings of the CATs. What are the limitations, and what resistance is there to it?

Despite the increase of available neuroscientific literature sources, the question still stands as to whether polyvagal theory adequately captures all facets of CAT interventions, and thus whether the distinctive value is sufficiently emphasized. Therefore, it is crucial to determine *when* and *how* this theory can specifically contribute to the understanding of how CAT interventions lead to certain effects.

The central question of this workshop is: how can we responsibly apply this theory in CAT teaching, practice and research, and what are the necessary nuances so that the (personal) experience of engaging in the arts will be preserved?

Therefore, in this workshop we intend not only to disseminate theoretical knowledge, but also to jointly explore and discuss how and to what extent polyvagal theory (and perhaps other

neuroscientific perspectives as well?) could be meaningful for CATs. In addition, the workshop will include *practical therapeutic exercises* linked to this topic related to art therapy and music therapy.

Are you ready to explore the possibilities, limitations and future implications of the polyvagal theory for research, practice and education in creative arts therapies?

De polyvagale theorie en vaktherapie: zingen ze in of uit de toon samen?

Het neurowetenschappelijk perspectief heeft de laatste jaren een grote vlucht genomen, vooral bij het verklaren van de impact van negatieve stress, angst en trauma gerelateerde hulpvragen. Een van deze perspectieven is de polyvagale theorie, die zich ontwikkelt tot een van de meest gebruikte verklaringen voor de effectiviteit van ervaringsgerichte interventies, zoals creatieve therapieën. Deze theorie lijkt te worden omarmd door vaktherapeuten en onderzoekers, omdat er wereldwijd een toenemende vraag is naar de onderbouwing van vaktherapie door middel van wetenschappelijke theorieën. Maar is deze theorie echt de 'heilige graal'? Wat zijn de beperkingen, welke weerstand bestaat ertegen? Toch is het ook cruciaal om na te gaan wat deze theorie kan bijdragen aan de onderbouwing van de effectiviteit van kunstzinnige therapieën en het begrip van hoe interventies tot effect leiden. Ondanks de toename in beschikbare neurowetenschappelijke literatuurbronnen, blijft het een uitdaging om te bepalen of de polyvagale theorie alle facetten van creatieve kunstzinnige therapieën adequaat omvat(ten), en dus ook of de onderscheidende waarde van creatieve therapieën voldoende erkend wordt door het gebruik van deze theorie.

De centrale vraag van deze workshop is: hoe kunnen we deze theorie op een verantwoorde manier inzetten in onderwijs, praktijk en onderzoek?

Daarom willen we in deze workshop niet alleen theoretische kennis verspreiden, maar ook gezamenlijk verkennen en bespreken hoe en in welke mate de polyvagale theorie behulpzaam kan zijn bij het verklaren/begrijpen van de effecten van creatief therapeutische interventies. Daarnaast zal de workshop praktische therapeutische oefeningen bevatten op het gebied van beeldende therapie en muziektherapie.

Ben je er klaar voor om de mogelijkheden, beperkingen, en implicaties van de polyvagaal theorie voor toekomstig onderzoek, de praktijk, en onderwijs in vaktherapie te verkennen?

Biography

Annemarie Abbing PhD is a senior researcher/lecturer in art therapy at University of Applied Sciences Leiden, with a special interest in research of mechanisms of change and a doctorate in art therapy for anxiety. She also holds a small postdoc position at the Open University in The Netherlands, where she studies the effectiveness and mechanisms of change of arts therapies in forensic psychiatric settings.

Ingrid Péntzes PhD is an art therapist, mental health scientist and holds a doctorate in the relationship between the art form and mental health. Since 2021, after nearly 20 years of teaching at universities of applied sciences, she has been an independent writer, researcher, and lecturer at the intersection of art and health at Where Art meets Health.

Martina de Witte PhD is a McKenzie postdoctoral researcher at the University of Melbourne. As a music therapist, she worked for many years in forensic psychiatry, in which music therapy treatment was mainly focused on reducing stress and anxiety. As a researcher/lecturer she focuses on the effects and mechanisms of music interventions for stress reduction. She shares her knowledge through both international publications and conferences.

Recent publications and conference presentations

Abbing, A, de Sonnevile, L, Baars, E, Bourne, D, Swaab, H. (2019). **Anxiety reduction through art therapy in women. Exploring stress regulation and executive functioning as underlying neurocognitive mechanisms.** *PLOS ONE* 14(12): e0225200.

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De Witte, M., Pinho, A.D.S., Stams, G.J., Moonen, X., Bos, A.E. & van Hooren, S. (2022).

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