

Art Therapy Research Strategic Planning: Progress and Prospects

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In 2019, we initiated a community-driven art therapy research strategic plan to bolster the resilience and advancement of our discipline. This multi-phasic endeavour, rooted in systematic methodology, encompassed the development of a comprehensive mission, vision, interventions, and desired outcomes designed to sustain the art therapy profession. Our motivation drew from significant transformations in socio-political and scientific landscapes, the prominence of research planning trends in related fields, and the absence of a tailored, multi-phasic strategic research plan for art therapy. Our research comprised three phases: an exhaustive scoping review, a comprehensive survey and focus groups, and an international symposium, utilising both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis.

In this presentation, we will focus on pivotal junctures in our journey: the design and implementation of the art therapy research strategic plan. We will elucidate how findings from phase one, a rigorous scoping review of art therapy research trends, catalysed subsequent phases. Phase two engaged art therapists through surveys and focus groups to gather their perspectives on research priorities, informing the contours of our strategic plan. These quantitative and qualitative findings, converged to define the contours of our strategic plan, spotlighting the need to contextualise research priorities, embrace diverse research methods, and foster researcher competence. Phase three involved an international symposium to unveil preliminary results, introduce strategic planning processes, spark discussions on prioritised research areas, and refine strategies for education, advocacy, clinical theory, research worldview, evidence, and research methods. Join us as we explore how we have analysed and integrated data from all three phases to formulate and diligently implement our strategic plan, addressing the challenges encountered and lessons learned in the evolving landscape of art therapy research.

Short biography

Nancy Gerber, Ph.D, ATR-BC is Specialized Teaching Faculty in the Graduate Art Therapy Program, Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida; and, Associate Clinical Professor Emerita at Drexel University where she founded and directed the Ph.D. in Creative Arts Therapies. Dr. Gerber has presented and published on doctoral education for art therapists, mixed methods research, aesthetic intersubjective worldview in research and practice, arts-based research, art therapy research, and the mechanisms of change in the creative arts therapies. Dr. Gerber co-created the Arts-Based Research Global Consortium to advance socially responsible arts-based research and co-facilitates the annual Arts-Based Research SIG at the International Congress of Qualitative Research. She co-founded the Art Therapy Community Research Network dedicated to advancing art therapy research. She recently published a book *Imagination and Arts-Based Practices for Integration in Research*. Dr. Gerber was a recipient of the 2022-2023 Teaching Award for Outstanding Graduate Teaching from Florida State University.

Dr. Van Lith currently holds the position of Course Coordinator for the Master of Art Therapy. After completing her PhD, she assumed a tenure-track position at Florida State University, where she played a crucial role in coordinating clinical placements.

Her research endeavours have primarily focused on art therapy and mental health recovery, as well as investigations into research and professional aspects of art therapy. Dr. Van Lith has served as the Principal Investigator on several impactful research projects, including group art therapy, early intervention art therapy for Latinx farmworker children, mindfulness-based art therapy, and technology-assisted art-based methods to address anxiety and stress in university students. She currently serves as an Associate Editor for the American Art Therapy Association and is a Board Member for the Australian, New Zealand, and Asian Creative Arts Therapy Association (ANZACATA). Dr. Van Lith's work has been recognized through various teaching and research awards.

Recent publications and conference presentations

Gerber, N., Van Lith, T., & Centracchio, M. (2023). **Creating an art therapy research strategic plan: A community participatory approach.** *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 85, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2023.102061>

Van Lith, T., Gerber, N., & Centracchio, M. (2023). **Preliminary modelling for strategic planning in art therapy research: A multi-phase sequential mixed methods study.** *The Arts in Psychotherapy*. Advance online publication.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2023.102055>

Gerber, N. & Siegesmund, R.(Eds.)(2022). **Innovations in arts-based research: ABR provocations from the 16th International Congress of Qualitative Research** [Special Issue]. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 15(2). DOI: 10.1177/19408447221090651

Van Lith, T., Beerse, M., Smalley, Q. (2022). **A qualitative inquiry comparing mindfulness-based art therapy versus neutral clay tasks as a proactive mental health solution for college students.** *J Am Coll Health*. 2022 Aug-Sep;70(6):1889-1897. doi: 10.1080/07448481.2020.1841211
