

Educating arts therapists for practice in a time of climate crisis: queries and initiatives

Ditty Dokter, Alida Gersie, Judith Revers, Alenka Vidrih

Environmental depletion and climate change are defining issues of our time. Their disastrous effects are gathering speed at an alarming pace. They detrimentally impact vulnerable communities across the world - communities that have done the least to create them. Consequently, social inequality and climate injustice are severely exacerbated. The panel discusses how this stark reality can be addressed in the education and training of arts therapists in their respective disciplines.

The following learning-foci for arts therapies training programmes and practices will be explored:

1. The generation of commitment to the creation of sustainable work environments, as well as the sourcing, sharing and reuse of materials and their disposal.
2. The function of ‘arts-based preparation for climate-stress and disaster’ in diverse treatment contexts.
3. The development of ‘community-centred, arts-based post-disaster interventions and resilience-support’, in light of the fact that further troubling environmental changes will inevitably take place.
4. The panel will also attend to the need to educate staff and students in arts-based means to differentiate ‘realistic eco-concerns’ from ‘clinically relevant eco-anxiety’.
5. And finally: the crucial importance of play and arts-engagement in times of danger and darkness.

During and after the panel discussion the attendees are creatively enabled to share resources. Comments and questions from the floor will be addressed.

In summary, the panel aims to highlight specific curricular goals and objectives that prepare students for the climate-related real-world conditions that they and their clients encounter,

thereby to generate a spirit of aware hope and action-oriented vitality.

Biography

Alida Gersie PhD is a dramatherapist, widely published author and acclaimed authority in the arts therapies, therapeutic story-work, bereavement-counselling and popular education. Between 1982 and 2003 she designed, taught and directed postgraduate arts therapies degrees at universities in the UK and Europe. She is an engaged environmentalist and has, since the 1970s, offered consultancy to many organisations on how best to generate and support people's enduring commitment to pro-environmental behaviour. Her most recent book (co-edited) is *Storytelling for Nature Connection: Environment, Community and Story-Based Learning*. Stroud: Hawthorn Press, 2022.

Recent publications and conference presentations

North American Dramatherapy Association, National Conference, Paper/Workshop: **Drama therapy's role in building climate change agency, hope and connection** (with Dr Nisha Sajnani and Dr Jessica Bleuer). (2023)

The British Association of Dramatherapists, National Conference, Paper: **Dramatherapy in the age of plasticosis**. (2023)

Other presentations since 2021 at annual gathering of Speech and Language Therapists, Chennai Global Storytelling Festival, a.o.

Gersie, A., Nanson, A., Schieffelin, E, (1922) **Storytelling for nature connection: environment, community and story-based learning**. Stroud: Hawthorn Press.