

Future Directions for Art Therapy Research: Developing a Strategic Plan

Nancy Gerber and Theresa Van Lith

Since the inception of art therapy, the political, socio-economic, and scientific climate has changed. In our current climate, we must demonstrate our impact by providing goals, applications, therapeutic mechanisms, and outcomes using substantive and credible forms of evidence. Over the past year, we have been identifying and implementing the steps towards developing a multi-phasic plan to actualize and formalize a proposed strategy for art therapy research. Currently our multi-phasic plan includes collecting, analysing, and synthesizing data from multiple critical sources.

This presentation focuses on the status of our strategic planning process. We initially conducted a scoping review of current trends in art therapy research using art therapy conference presentations and peer-reviewed journal articles. There were three main aims in this process. The first was to systematically identify current research topics, methodologies and methods, knowledge gaps, and recommendations for implementation and future research. The second aim was to critically examine the level of credibility, validity, and trustworthiness of recent art therapy research perspectives, methods, and results. The third aim was the development of criteria by which to evaluate the research practices relative to the needs of the field, transferability, and potential impact.

As a consequence of our review, we were able to develop several recommendations for the next phase in the strategic plan. These include: (1) conceptualizing an art therapy worldview; (2) evaluating and developing innovative and radical art therapy research methods; (3) identifying relevant theoretical and clinical topics for further research; (4) determining therapeutic mechanisms or elements of change; (5) exploring research transferability and implementation; (6) defining relevant forms of evidence for the sustenance and advancement of the field; and, (7) exploring the curricular and pedagogical elements of research training for future generations.

Biography

Nancy Gerber, Ph.D, ATR-BC is Associate Clinical Professor Emerita and founding and former director of the Ph.D Program in Creative Arts Therapies at Drexel University. She currently is Teaching Faculty at Florida State University. Previously she was the Director of the Graduate Art Therapy Program at Drexel University. 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, and the mechanisms of change in the creative arts therapies. She was a former vice-chair of the IRB and currently chairs the Doctoral Education Subcommittee for the American Art Therapy Association. She co-facilitates the Arts-Based Research SIG at the International Congress of Qualitative Research. Dr. Gerber has developed the Arts-Based Research Global Consortium to advance socially responsible arts-based research. Dr. Gerber was the first recipient of the first Distinguished Educator's Award from the American Art Therapy Association.

Dr. Theresa Van Lith, Ph.D, ATR-BC, AThR, is an Associate Professor and Clinical Coordinator in Art Therapy at Florida State University. She is also Associate Journal Editor of *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association* and has previously received the AATA Rawley Silver Award. Dr. Van Lith has been PI on a randomized controlled trial using mindfulness-based art therapy among college students. She is currently working on conducting a follow-up trial through receiving a National Endowment for the Arts Research Award. This project has also resulted in the development of a commercially viable app. Dr. Van Lith has been PI on a multidisciplinary project focused on early intervention art therapy with Latino farmworker children. Previously, she has also conducted research on art therapy professional development, art therapy service delivery models within mental health services, art therapy evaluation models for mental health services, qualitative research, and art-based

research in art therapy.

Recent publications and conference presentations

Dr. Gerber

Gerber, N., Biffi, E., Biondo, J., Gemignani, M., Hannes, K., & Siegesmund, R. (2020). Arts-Based Research in the Social and Health Sciences: Pushing for Change with an Interdisciplinary Global Arts-Based Research Initiative. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 21(2), <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-21.2.3496>.

Gerber, N., Kapitan, L., Gussak, D., Forinash, M., Kaimal, G., & LaCivita, J. (2020). Doctoral Education in Art Therapy: Current Trends and Future Directions. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*. DOI: 10.1080/07421656.2020.1761735

Gerber, N., Siegesmund, R., Hannes, K., Gemignani, M., Biondo, J., & Biffi, E. (2020, February). *A Global Arts-Based Research Agenda Gamechanger 2019 Report and Recommendations*. Symposium presentation at the European Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Malta.

Gerber, N., & Van Lith, T. (2019, November). *Considering a strategic plan for research in art therapy*. Paper presented at the American Art Therapy Association, Kansas City, Kansas.

Gerber, N., Bryl, K., Potvin, N., & Blank, C. A. (2018). Arts-based research approaches to studying mechanisms of change and transformation in the Creative Arts Therapies [Special issue]. *Frontiers in Psychology Special Issue: The state of the art in Creative Arts Therapies*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02076>

Dr. Van Lith

Van Lith, T. (presented 2020, February). *Art making as transformative in mental health recovery*. Paper presented at 4th European Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, European Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, St. Julians, Malta. (International)

Beerse, M., Van Lith, T., Pickett, S., & Stanwood, G. (2019). Biobehavioral utility of mindfulness-based art therapy: Neurobiological underpinnings and mental health impacts. *Experimental Biology and Medicine*, 245(2), 122-130. doi:10.1177/1535370219883634

Van Lith, T., & Beerse, M. (2019). An examination of contemporary and promising research strategies in art therapy. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 36(3), 141-148. doi:10.1080/07421656.2019.1645499

Van Lith, T., & Bullock, L. (2019). Do art therapists use vernacular? How art therapists communicate their scope of practice. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 35(3), 1-9. doi:10.1080/07421656.2018.1540961

Beerse, M., Van Lith, T., & Stanwood, G. (2019). Is there a biofeedback response to art therapy? A technology-assisted approach for reducing anxiety and stress in college students. *SAGE Open*, 9(2), 1-12. doi:10.1177/2158244019854646