**Dr. Unnur Ottarsdottir**

**Processing Emotions and Memorising Coursework through Memory Drawing**

Quantitative and qualitative research on ‘Memory Drawing’ will be reviewed in this presentation. Research will be reviewed about the effectiveness of drawing compared to writing when facilitating memory over differing time frames. When drawing/writing was recalled three weeks after the original memorisation, the median number of recalled words/drawings was two written words and five drawn. The research findings also showed that drawing is generally as much as five times more effective then writing for longer-term memory or when the drawings/words were recalled nine weeks after the original memorisation, without any recall within the nine-week period. To my knowledge, research of this sort into this long-term memory of drawings had not previously been conducted.

The qualitative case study part of the research demonstrates how sensitive emotional material can be brought up and processed through memory drawing and the way in which memory drawing can facilitate coursework learning. Examples of the application of the memory drawing method will be provided. The memory drawing research will be contextualised within the literature on related research studies, methods and theories.

Participants will be invited to take part in a drawing/writing exercise which explains the way in which the quantitative part of the research was conducted. The exercise also provides insight into the functions of memorising through drawing and writing. An art therapy framework was found to be important both for understanding the way in which memory drawing works and also for drawing boundaries and considering the ethics of the memory drawing method.

Further information about the memory drawing research can be found in the paper “Processing Emotions and Memorising Coursework through Memory Drawing”, which was published in 2018 in ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine. <http://journals.gold.ac.uk/index.php/atol/article/view/486/pdf>

**Biography**

**Dr Unnur Ottarsdottir** is an art therapist, artist and teacher. She has practised art therapy in private practice and in a variety of organizations, including schools, since 1991. Unnur received her PhD degree from the University of Hertfordshire, England, in 2006. She teaches art therapy at the Iceland University of the Arts and in other institutions in Iceland and internationally. Unnur is a practising researcher at the Reykjavik Academy and she has written articles and book chapters which have been published internationally about memory and drawing, art therapy in education and the methodology of Grounded Theory. Her research interests include art therapy in education for children with specific learning difficulties who have experienced trauma and art-making as a therapeutic and learning approach, including drawing for memorisation and emotional processing. Unnur has given lectures at conferences and organizations in Iceland and worldwide.

**Recent publications and conference presentations**

**Publications**

Ottarsdottir, U. (2019) Ethical Concern when Applying Drawing for Memory: Research Conducted in Iceland. In: Di Maria, A. (ed.) *Exploring Ethical Dilemmas in Art Therapy* (pp. 266-272). New York: Routledge.

Ottarsdottir, U. (2018) Processing Emotions and Memorising Coursework through Memory Drawing. ATOL: *Art Therapy OnLine*, 9(1). Retrieved from: [http://journals.gold.ac.uk/index.php/atol/article/view/486/pdf.](http://journals.gold.ac.uk/index.php/atol/article/view/486/pdf)

**Presentations**

2019: Presentation: Processing Emotions and Memorising Coursework through Memory Drawing. The American Art Therapy Association Conference. Celebrating 50 Years of Healing Through Art. Kansas City, MO.

2019: Presentation: Processing Emotions and Memorising Coursework through Memory Drawing. The International Practice/Research Conference. Queen Mary’s University, London.

2018: Keynote: Processing Emotions and Memorising Coursework through Memory Drawing. 20th Nordic Art Therapies Conference, Hveragerdi, Iceland.