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Global art therapy training—Now and before[☆]

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Introduction

The world, a place of beauty and wonder, can also be confusing, desolate and dangerous. In the last decade, the world, instead of moving its people toward a higher quality of life, has, because of HIV/AIDS and international/cultural wars, put millions and millions of children and their families more at risk (UNICEF, 2005).

Art therapists in the United States, wanting to help others and share a profession they love, are motivated to travel to reach out to at-risk-populations. Teachers, counselors and art therapists in other countries are equally as interested in sharing their professional experience with similar populations both in the United States and throughout the world.

This article identifies early art therapy trainers from the United States. It includes some of their experiences and ways they incorporate their work and travel. It looks at trainers in the 80s and 90s, and concludes by looking at the direction global training has taken since September 11, 2001. I want to thank all of the contributors who generously furnished resumes and allowed me to interview them and often reviewed what I had written about them. Although traveling and presenting one's life skills is exciting it can also be difficult and wearing. The early trainers were all educators. In addition to traveling, they had family and job responsibilities. This continues to be true of current trainers.

For 35 years, art therapy has allowed many of us to participate in a profession with which we have had a true and lasting love affair. In the United States, most art therapists feel fortunate to make a living doing something both creative and beneficial for humanity. I know this is true because I have lived it and hear it again and again from peers and former students. We are fortunate to make a living encouraging creative engagement, communication, inner

[☆] Please consider this article an invitation to any reader who feels there are significant omissions, and send corrections and additions via electronic mail. I have taught many international students and would particularly enjoy hearing from people who came to the United States to work.

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healing and wellness. Art and image, created regardless of age or ethnicity, are some of humanity's first models for sharing experiences and communicating values and meaning. Art and image are universal and intrinsic. They promote curiosity and encourage a sense of discovery. They give individuals opportunities to learn about themselves as well as others (Arrington, 2001). Often, as we witness the power of art as therapy, we are motivated to learn how people in far away places use art for communication and healing. We develop a yearning for travel as it facilitates growth and connectedness. We learn language differences, diverse customs, and different ways of preparing foods. We meet new friends and connect with others who have similar interests. Traveling gives us opportunities to engage in cross and multicultural collaborations and to expand our world-views. Traveling and teaching art therapy permits sharing professional skills with people who have had different experiences and opportunities. Returning from our travels we bring back more than cherished memories, artistic appreciation, and the satisfaction of being able to live out our dreams; we bring back a sense of global connectedness and spiritual renewal.

To some, the dynamics of art therapy in its right-brain, abstract, artistic, colorful, creative, passive and holistic environment are becoming more left-brain—active, intellectual, logical, scientific, sharp-focused, and rational. Always a powerful tool that provides individuals a uniquely personal “manner for creative expression”, art therapists understand that “complex life events cannot always be understood through talking about what happened . . . often the full impact can only be described and contained through metaphors, imagery, myth and story, or sometimes play without words” (Cattanach, 2002, p. 8). We saw this on international television in January 2005, when children who survived the tsunami were being treated for its traumatic events and results. It is not surprising that art therapists throughout the world are eager to respond when the calls for papers, instructors, workshops, missions, conferences, and delegations on topics of interest arrive. The good news is that when we are invited, or when we invite others, the mutual sharing of culture and art therapy experiences opens new life paths and opportunities. The not-so-good news is that on occasion and in some locations in the United States and overseas, although treated graciously, accommodations may include shared beds, apartments five flights up with no elevator, limited water sources, transportation issues, or outdoor plumbing. Materials may be sparse or extra heavy. Audio-visual equipment may not work with the equipment the invitee brings with him or her. Long schedules, language differences, interpreters, hard beds, drivers, and jet lag are tiring but sharing professional skills, personal experiences, and interests in these kinds of settings fosters rich and enduring friendships and fills our souls.

Early global trainers

“Because art therapy is more developed in the United States than in other countries, senior American art therapists often were invited to present their work internationally,” wrote Wadeson (2004, p. 3). Invited for various reasons – teaching workshops, conferences, giving keynote addresses, leading delegations – early trainers Myra Levick (67); Frances Anderson (70s); Shaun McNiff (80s); Paolo Knill (80s); Helen Landgarten (69); Arthur Robbins (70s); Judith Rubin (80s); Harriet Wadeson (70s); and others have been included in this prominent and respected group for over 30 years.

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