

Building a Sustainable Art Therapy Program in Hong Kong

Abstract

As the field of art therapy continues to mature and develop, it will also continue to migrate to parts of the world beyond the Western nations dominated by the United States and United Kingdom. When it arrives in each individual country, practitioners and educators will need to learn how to best introduce the profession, including offering sustainable models for training future art therapists. While the use of the arts in therapeutic contexts occurs throughout the world, the disciplined practice of art therapy is relatively rare in comparison to other helping service professions, such as psychology, nursing, social work, and counseling. Several art therapists have commented on the difficulty and ethics of standardizing art therapy training programs across international borders due to diverse expectations within individual countries for what constitutes as art and what qualifies as therapy (Arrington, 2005; Stoll, 2005; Kalmanowitz & Potash, 2010). In lack of common standards or an international one, educators must reconcile professional ethics and navigate essential aspects of art therapy education within the local culture in which they work.

Currently, there are four organizations—American Art Therapy Association, British Association of Art Therapists, Australia/New Zealand Art Therapy Association, and the International Expressive Arts Therapy Association—that provide either accreditation or recommendations for what should be included in an art therapy training program. In addition,

Moon (2003) recommends core components to infuse in art therapy education. Navigating all of these standards and incorporating them into the local country's expectations is both a creative and tricky endeavor. Although it may be impractical, unenforceable, and culturally insensitive to demand one international standard for art therapy education, arriving at common ideas as to what should be included in education are important for the profession to grow on a global scale. A challenge in arriving at an international standard, however, is to ensure that it is truly an international standard and not simply a Western one imposed on the rest of the world.

Focusing on the development of art therapy in Hong Kong, as an example, allows art therapy educators to determine the foundation elements of art therapy education that will simultaneously allow graduates to practice in their home country, while being seen as equals by their colleagues who attend programs in the West. This point calls to mind important considerations for such areas as curriculum, practicum requirements, and educator qualifications. In addition to the challenges of honoring local educational systems, developing programs can learn from issues that have developed in Western programs. For example, the lack of evidenced-based research from the West has been an obstacle to the profession's credibility around the globe. In order to remedy this hindrance, research can be incorporated as a necessary component in developing educational programs. The result will not only enhance the profession in its own country, but will be able to contribute to a global

understanding of art therapy. The challenge of whether to offer dual-track programs or certificate options in the West with their potential affect on profession identity can be considered and integrated. By learning from neighboring programs in Asia and the West, the challenges to designing a program and developing a profession can enhance the quality of art therapy education and service delivery. In order to ensure worldwide sustainable art therapy training programs, we will need to find the careful balance between globalization of standards and the unique value of local traditions.

References

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