

ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

In what ways does professional identity affect the practice of art therapy?

Chair's Introduction

Dr. Andrea Gilroy

The theme of this panel is the way in which a practitioner's professional identity affects what they do. I'm going to give you a brief overview of our topic and something of my personal view about it all.

Our panel members this morning come from different professional backgrounds:

Chrissie comes from a background in theatre and now runs the MA in Cross Sectoral and Community Arts here at Goldsmiths. She is an arts practitioner, researcher, facilitator and trainer. She's worked in central and Eastern Europe, in Palestine, Uganda and Japan, focusing on the role of the arts in social change and cultural dialogue in the business and charity sectors.

Val is the Chief Executive Officer of the British Association of Art Therapists. She is an art therapist, group psychotherapist and organizational consultant, having trained originally as a sculptor. Val has worked in adult psychiatry and in child and adolescent mental health.

Jan was originally an art teacher and is now the Academic Director of the Melbourne Institute for Experiential and Creative Arts Therapy aka MIECAT. She developed MIECAT's particular approach to experiential, multi-modal learning, teaching and knowing. She's an arts educator, researcher, photographer and installation artist.

The point here is that they all position art as central to their work, and they all work therapeutically with different groups of people. The questions posed this morning are:

- just how different *are* their professional identities and their associated practices, whether these are construed as participatory arts, art therapy or artistic inquiry, and ...
- how have these identities and practices developed?

I'm delighted to be chairing this particular panel, not least because I have long been interested in how art therapy, and art therapists, are 'shaped' by differing social, political and cultural contexts, by regulatory requirements and by the various personal and work experiences that happen along life's way.

This interest was central to my PhD (Gilroy, 1992), which was about art therapists and their art. This explored how experiences during art therapy education and subsequently in art therapists' working lives influenced their art practice (see also Gilroy, 1989; 1995). During this research I came across the concept of 'professional socialisation'. This

refers to the social process that shapes an individual and develops their professional identity as they go through training, enter work and continue their professional development, all so that they become the person that the job demands (Becker, 1964).

The process of professional socialisation involves the crucial influence of 'significant others': one's teachers, supervisors and mentors and of course one's peers – all those people who you learn from, interact with and work with every day, who influence what you do and how you think about what you do, and who of course change as you proceed through life and move in and out of different jobs, meet and work with different groups of people, and learn different things (Super, 1957, 1980, 1981; Rosenberg, 1973).

Now I'm fortunate to have had a long and varied career as an art therapy educator, supervisor and researcher. This has been spent almost entirely at Goldsmiths, except for various times spent living, working and researching in Australia. However, the last few years have seen me move into university management. I would say that my ongoing connections with Australia and becoming and being a senior manager in a university have significantly re-shaped my professional identity and how I think about what I do.

My 'professional' identity is about to change again. I'm coming to the end of a sabbatical during which I've been researching the policies and processes of retirement, this in connection with the Human Resources Department here at Goldsmiths. This brings together the academic, the manager, the therapist and the artist in me and links (rather happily I have to say) with pure self-interest, which derives from the fact that I will retire very soon.

Research suggests that the last thing most retirees do nowadays is cease work; rather what 'work' is - and what one's professional and *personal* identity is - changes as people embark on what is known as an 'encore' career (Shultz and Wang, 2011). So

what kind of professional identity will I have? Will I still have a professional identity at all? Will that matter?

So here I am, looking backwards with interest and forwards with curiosity, and wondering how these three women have thought about their professional identities across the trajectories of their careers. How have their professional identities been shaped by their education, their jobs, the contexts in which they have worked, and indeed the colleagues and issues they have worked with? How have their professional identities been shaped and how has their practice developed over time?

What Chrissie, Jan and Val are now going to do is tell us about significant experiences that have shaped their professional identities, be they personal, political, relational or organizational, through narratives both visual and verbal.

How will these identities and narratives meet and where will they differ? Let's find out.

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