

CONFERENCE REPORT

The 20th Nordic Art Therapies Conference 'Diversity within the creative arts therapies'

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Tónstofa Valgerðar, Iceland

CONFERENCE DETAILS

The 20th Nordic Art Therapies Conference
'Diversity within the creative arts therapies'
11-14 October 2018, Hveragerði, Iceland

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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BACKGROUND

In 1975, Sigríður Björnsdóttir held the first conference about art therapy in Reykjavík, Iceland, where she invited doctors and scholars from various Scandinavian countries to come and talk about art therapy with children. Sigríður Björnsdóttir worked as an art therapist on the children's ward at the National Hospital (Landspítalinn) in Reykjavík. Since then the Nordic Art Therapy Conference has grown and is now held every two years, with the next conference to be held in Sweden in 2020.

In 2016, the Association of Art Therapists in Iceland (FLÍS) contacted the Association of Music Therapists in Iceland (FÍSMÚS) as well as the only drama therapist practising in the country at the time. They requested that we (music and drama therapists) join them in organising the 20th Nordic Art Therapy Conference to be held in Iceland in 2018 (www.ncatc2018.is). The focus for the conference thus changed from being specific to art therapy to include all the creative arts therapies and, accordingly, the theme of the conference then focused on diversity.

NUMBERS

We were joined by 102 participants from 20 countries all over the world, so the conference turned out to be truly international. We had a total of 21 workshops, of which four were on music therapy, and 19 paper presentations; two were on music therapy practice, four were on research into music therapy/creative arts therapies and one was on music therapy supervision. There were three keynote speakers, of which two were Icelandic, Dr Unnur Ottósdóttir in art therapy and Dr Valgerður Jónsdóttir in music therapy. The keynote drama therapist, Dr Nishja Sajnam, came from the United States.

The conference committee had been keen on making this a practice-oriented conference from the beginning, with an emphasis on workshops, whereas the papers described both practical work and research. We also aimed to have a diverse programme balanced between the different creative forms of therapy. Unfortunately there were not as many music therapists that sent in workshop or paper proposals as art therapists, and there were therefore fewer music and drama therapists presenting than art therapists and, unfortunately, not all forms of creative art therapies were represented.

An evaluation form was sent out to the participants. Given that the organising team worked on a voluntary basis without any connection to the Icelandic academic system, or for that matter any previous experience of organising a conference, we were very grateful for the overall positive and constructive comments.

MUSIC THERAPY AT THE CONFERENCE

The music therapy keynote speaker was Dr Valgerður Jónsdóttir. Her keynote speech *Community Centred Music Caring* was based on over 30 years of theoretical reflections and practical experience as a music therapist and as a special music teacher with people of different ages and with various conditions. Her aim was to approach an answer to the question which we all must ask ourselves: “*What defines me as a therapist?*”

The four music therapy workshops were indeed very varied and diverse. We started with a workshop where four Icelandic music therapists (half of all music therapists in Iceland) gave insight into their work. We all work mainly with children and adolescents: Inga B Ingadóttir and Soffia Fr Rafnsdóttir Hede within the mainstream school system, Minerva M Haraldsdóttir with adolescents with emotional problems, and I work in the field of special needs education.

Dutch music therapists Carola Werger and Marijke Groothuis held a workshop on *How to Mix and Match Music Technology into Your Clinical Work*. They demonstrated the use of music technology in music therapy, and we tried out their equipment as well as discussing its possible applications in music therapy.

Monica Wagner, also from the Netherlands, had a workshop on *Musical Sculptures Creating New Perspectives*. She demonstrated two ways of working: the thematic sculpture and the family sculpture. In family sculpture the client uses different instruments to represent family members while the group plays the instruments. Thus the family relations are explored. In thematic sculpture the client brings a theme/problem where different instruments represents diverse aspects of the theme. The group plays the instruments for exploration.

Agnieszka Luciuk-Wojzuk from Poland led a workshop entitled *A Journey Deep Into the Self*, based on music therapy with oncology patients. The workshop included awareness exercises and movements in pairs to music.

The paper presentations also covered a wide range of topics. From the UK, we had Joy Gravestock presenting work with a disabled child, and Galia Bitton, from Israel, described her work with adolescent girls in a special education class. Furthermore, Malle Luik, from Estonia, presented her paper on Group Supervision for Music Therapy Students in Tallinn. From the Netherlands, we had various papers on research conducted by the Research Institute for Creative Arts Therapies (RIArT). They described a variety of ongoing studies, such as the effects of music therapy on neuropsychiatric

symptoms in dementia, by Anna-Eva Prick, the effects of music interventions on stress-related outcomes, by Martina de Witte, and finally Susan van Hooren's paper on diversity in research: subjective experiences, bodily states, and working methods.

LOOKING AHEAD

For us in Iceland, both the conference committee and the professional associations, this conference was a boost of inspiration and energy. It was a real thrill to have so many visitors from all over the world and to get in touch with new colleagues within our often isolated field of work. The next Nordic Art Conference will be held in Sweden, 11-14 June 2020. The theme of the conference will be 'Compassion and Inclusion in Art Therapy' (<http://compassionandinclusioninarttherapy.eu/>). As far as I am aware of it will focus on Art Therapy, but welcome other forms of creative therapies.