

# **Singapore – London: Intercultural - Intersubjective Discoveries Between Two Art Therapy Training Programmes Using An Art-based Approach**

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The aims of this exploratory project were to: develop knowledge and understanding of intercultural issues and themes to inform the teaching and learning and the theories and practices of art therapy in the contexts of Singapore and London; and to engage staff, students and alumni of both places to collaborate in an art-based inquiry to explore their intercultural visits and group encounters using art-based approaches. This work contributes to the wider field of art therapy to inform and potentially transform the teaching and learning processes towards embracing culturally diverse view-points.

## **Introduction**

For this project we wanted to deepen understanding and insight into our ways of teaching and learning in our particular contexts and to build on and explore the initial themes we discovered in the first stage of this work. These themes included the significance of; contexts and places; post-colonialism; cultures within training programmes; cultural perspectives on psychiatry, psychotherapy, mental health landscapes, aesthetics and art-making; and, gender in the profession.

We applied for the PIF to support the development of our partnership and consolidate our existing research project. With the broad aims to develop knowledge and understanding of intercultural issues and themes to inform the teaching and learning – and – the theories and practices of art therapy in the contexts of Singapore and London.

Our motivation is to become more aware of intercultural issues to inform the development of our respective teaching and learning approaches to issues of difference and cultural contexts. From the Goldsmiths perspective there is a need to internationalize and decolonize the curriculum and to learn through our partnership with LASALLE to decentre our view-point. Also, to involve students and alumni in this process to develop the connection between teaching, practice and research. From the LASALLE perspective there was a need to acknowledge and celebrate the profound art therapy

work that is being pioneered and developed in Singapore and Southeast Asia that is culturally relevant, meaningful and informed, and to instil confidence in showcasing this internationally. LASALLE's programme has a long-standing collaborative approach to teaching, practice and research that involves the teaching team, students and alumni. Accounting for this includes the overarching collective stance within Asian contexts as well as the strategic need to build up, enhance and foster currency, experience, expertise and multi-tiered professional supports for the emerging discipline in Singapore and the region.

## **Process and Participants**

We have taken an exploratory art-based inquiry approach. Using a process of heuristic reflexivity on image-making and lived experiences using methodologies such as Kolb's (1984) action research cycle of evaluation and Irwin & De Cosson's (2004) practise-based research of a/r/tography.

The project is designed to engage staff, students and alumni of both places to collaborate in an art-based inquiry process to explore the immersive intercultural visit experiences to London in June 2015 and to Singapore in May 2017. Followed by a further visit to London in July 2019 which was strategically aligned to the inaugural international American Art Therapy Association (AATA)/British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT) International conference on research and practice. These visits in London and Singapore with staff, student and alumni participants supported the exploration of experiences, make art responses and to use as materials for reflexive analysis. Alongside a focused literature review of writing and research on the topic, we are engaged in a process of collaborative writing to capture and distil the essence of these findings.

As a core team of educators (3 LASALLE and 2 Goldsmiths) we have sought to include students and alumni of both programmes (approx. 30+) to collaborate in this project in order to draw together a range of experiences and to build opportunities for intercultural encounters. Students were either London or Singapore-based, and alumni of both programmes reside in and/or have translocated to a range of countries (China, Indonesia, Japan, Philippines, Thailand to name a few).

## **Outputs and Impact**

The PIF supported the development of intercultural insights and understandings of working with issues of diversity and to create enhancements to teaching practices in both programmes. It has also strengthened the relationship between research and teaching and enhanced the professional development of staff, students and alumni through their involvement in exploring these issues. Sustaining professional networks have been established between several of the students, alumni and staff. A collaborative conference presentation and paper has been published on this work with more to follow.

Our work has been published in ATOL (Art Therapy On Line) an open access, peer review international journal and is adding knowledge to the wider field of art therapy to inform and potentially transform the teaching and learning processes with regard to embracing culturally diverse view-points. This also has significance to other arts therapies trainings in different contexts and to its theories and practices. Our use of art-based approaches also adds to a growing exploration of qualitative inquiry methods in the broader field. The dissemination of our developing work and findings has potential to inform the practice of art therapy internationally to interrelate theory, research and practice in ways that are timely and relevant.

### **Articles etc.**

Lay, R. Morris, L. Safian, E. and J, Westwood. (2017). Singapore – London, Intersubjective Discoveries: An Intercultural Experience Between Two Art Therapy Training Programmes Using An Art-Based Approach. Art therapy Online. Vol 8, No 1 <http://journals.gold.ac.uk/index.php/atol/article/view/433>

### **Authors**

We have come together as a group of art therapy educators to research and learn from each other's experiences in two distinct cultural contexts. As the project leads: Ronald Lay is a doctorate candidate researching perspectives of credentialed art therapists on experiential learning within postgraduate art therapy training, LASALLE, Singapore, and Dr Jill Westwood's PhD involved mapping the field of art therapy education in Australia, Goldsmiths-London with collaborators: Lesley Morris, STACS, Goldsmiths, Emylia Safian, School of Creative Industries, Faculty of Fine Arts, Media & Creative Industries, LASALLE and Mr Daniel Wong, School of Creative Industries, Faculty of Fine Arts, Media & Creative Industries, LASALLE.

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