

Book review

The introductory guide to art therapy: Experiential teaching and learning for students and practitioners

Susan Hogan and Annette M. Coulter

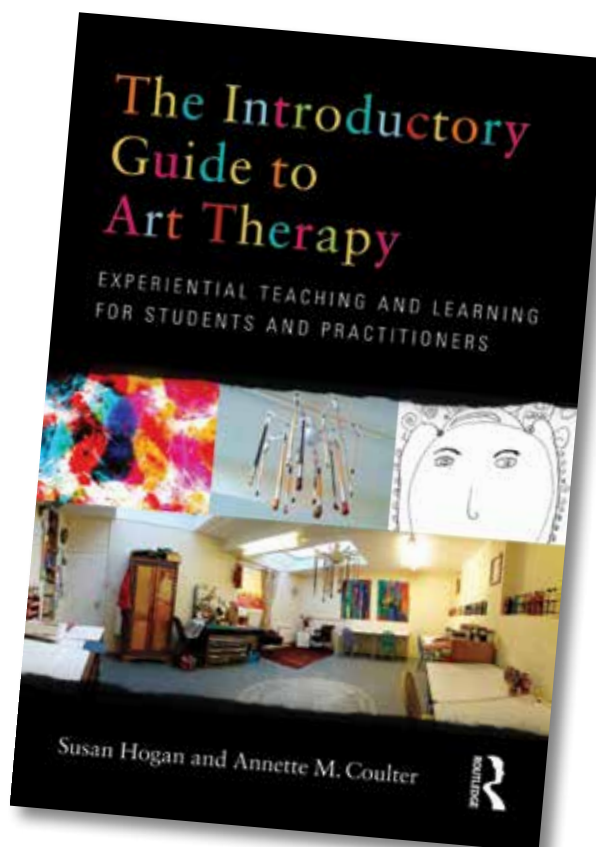
Routledge, London and New York, 2014 (ISBN 978-0-415-68215-2)

Reviewed by Suzanne Calomeris

Co-authored by two beacons in the field of art therapy – Susan Hogan, based in the United Kingdom, and Annette Coulter from Australia – *The introductory guide to art therapy* (as opposed to ‘An’ introductory guide) declares itself with authority from the outset. The subtitle, ‘Experiential teaching and learning for students and practitioners’, identifies the intended audience.

Judith Rubin, whose publications were essential reading for many of us in the formative years of our professional lives, wrote the Foreword. An art therapist of considerable experience based in the USA, Rubin sees being invited to comment on this book, by authors trained in a different place and time, as evidence of art therapy’s “having achieved sufficient security to be able to reach comfortably across borders, whether geographic, political, or theoretical” (p.xi). The maturity and inclusiveness identified by Rubin permeates the book with its international perspectives on theory and practice, as well as its account of art therapy’s clinical and educational reach.

The book began as a collaborative response by Coulter and Hogan following their involvement in the Singapore Masters of Art Therapy Program at LASALLE College of the Arts. That context provided rich soil for addressing issues of cross-cultural education and training, a key theme of the book. The authors also draw on their own early difficulties obtaining art therapy qualifications and finding suitable work. As a result, themes of



professional isolation and outsider-ness are addressed with sensitivity.

The opening chapters by Hogan scope the content and fundamentals of practice which define art therapy. Professional practice definitions and history, materials and the nature of the therapeutic space, boundaries and safety issues are introduced. A comparison of British and American approaches, application to various populations and the realities of work settings are elaborated upon in subsequent chapters. If the newcomer were to read no further than the opening chapters, they would already have been relieved of any

misconceptions they may have entertained about art therapy.

Art therapists and soon-to-be art therapists, experiencing the challenge of establishing art therapy “in a resistive environment with few professional supports” (p.62), will find value in Coulter’s chapter ‘Becoming an art therapy practitioner’. This often difficult transition is discussed with measured optimism, and covers methods of approaching training institutions and employers, methods of generating funding, documentation requirements, as well as engagement processes/assessment procedures with clients. Also discussed are helpful practicalities regarding private practice, professional indemnity insurance and partnering with other professional groups.

Coulter helps promote the profession through making art therapy practice more accessible and by dispelling misunderstandings. She sees the teaching of non-art therapists as an opportunity to share information in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Coulter continues bridge-building across professional chasms, introducing art therapy into a corporate sector setting, with parameters for facilitators including succinct processing guidelines. New graduates, students and the promotion-weary will find the comprehensive list of values supplied at the end of Chapter 7 extremely helpful. She continues her inclusive approach in ‘Art therapy and co-therapy’, steering the reader through the often murky waters of co-facilitation in various therapeutic contexts, with clear protocols regarding co-therapist selection and pithy art directives to use in debriefing sessions with one’s co-therapist.

Supervision, invaluable to practitioner professional growth, is discussed by both authors. Hogan writes compassionately of the supportive and empowering context of group supervision for trainees in practicum placements, and offers suggestions for those about to step into the supervisory role. Coulter’s chapter describes different models of supervision, adding personal therapy as a valued adjunct to supervision in the interests of delineating which issues are best aired where.

Alternatives for the isolated practitioner and art directives useful within the supervisory relationship are listed.

Practical, sequential art exercises for special populations are provided in abundance and Coulter is forward-thinking in an appraisal of the growing branches of practice. Restrictive influences on ‘best practice’ and the notion of competing agendas are brought into relief when discussing work with offenders.

Perhaps the densest reading is Hogan’s examination of ‘The role of the image in art therapy and intercultural reflections’. In this chapter, Hogan delineates the implications of the central role of the image within various practice models. The chapter will be of enormous benefit to all interested parties as our own ‘lenses’ are placed ‘under the lens’. The vexed issue of interpretation is presented within the context of culturally diverse groups, the upshot being to ‘make no assumptions’. Hogan notes sensitivity as “imperative” (p.119) to successfully work within diversity, and proposes a broader education on cultural competence in the field which would enable us to go beyond the blinkered view of our first-hand experience. She also addresses the pitfalls of a too rigid adherence to any particular theoretical framework and gives the last word on the inter-cultural, inter-subjective space to veteran Shaun McNiff.

Both authors see art interventions as an alternative form of communication able to “cut through complex verbal discourse” (p.151). Hogan discusses non-directive groups and the balance of art-expressive and verbal-expressive functions with reference to Diane Waller’s “curative features” (p.168) of group work. Modes of utilising art therapy with couples and families are described, including pertinent art therapy assessment tools. An emphasis by Coulter on educating allied health professionals likely to be co-therapist in these particular contexts is motivated by both client safety and inter-professional inclusion.

An engaging section by Hogan details an overview of the continuum of models of practice, drawing readers in to reflect upon

their own styles of practice. Variants of practice the author deems well outside this continuum are alluded to, and she gives a personal account of her use of the available spectrum very effectively in the 'Discussion'. This presentation of diversity is viewed objectively, and Hogan points out that there is no evidence to date regarding the greater efficacy of one model over another. Controversially, she asserts that the distinction between art therapy and art psychotherapy is a bogus one.

In a provocative final chapter on 'International perspectives', Coulter speculates on the future of art therapy, suggesting that something akin to individuation is needed for countries to grow beyond the foundations provided by the two largely unreconciled parents of the profession, Britain and America. In naming "The international dysfunctional family of art therapy" (p.222), Coulter displays impatience with the wheels of change. However, while building long-span bridges may be slow, dialogue is evident at all levels of our international community. A certain maturity is evident, as noted by Rubin in her Foreword, as seen in international dialogue through LinkedIn and other electronic forums, and also, for example, in the publications of the Art Therapy Credentials Board where international credentialing is a frequent point of discussion (O'Rollins, Tomasek, Moseman, & Hoshino, 2014).

The book is firmly grounded in a commitment to professional art therapy practice. Didactic issues in the training of art therapists, the emphasis on international bridge-building and respect for cultural diversity make the book highly relevant to current concerns. Introductory in its intention, this comprehensive text achieves its aim in offering a key art therapy resource for all practitioners using art-based approaches towards well-being. Its inclusion on trainee reading lists and in locations where the arts in the service of health are recognised is highly recommended. It is sure to inspire.

Reference

O'Rollins, C., Tomasek, K., Moseman, L., & Hoshino, J. (2014). Personal reflections of board members past and present. *ATCB Review*, 21(2), 1-14.